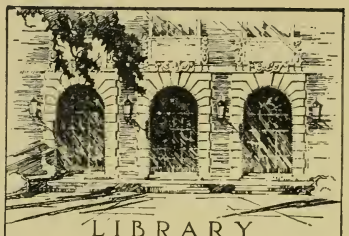
Michael Sadleir



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
P29a
v.3

# AT HER MERCY.

## A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.
1874.

(*All Rights Reserved.*)

823
P29a
v.3

# CONTENTS OF VOL. III.


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | "WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A GOD-BE-WITH-YOU" | 1 |
| II. | THE DRAINING OF THE CUP | 23 |
| III. | A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE | 52 |
| IV. | SEYMOUR'S HOME | 76 |
| V. | A SCRAP OF NOTE PAPER | 99 |
| VI. | UNDER HER THUMB | 123 |
| VII. | PROSTRATE | 143 |
| VIII. | GREAT NEWS | 164 |
| IX. | THE MESSAGE | 181 |
| X. | JUDITH'S DEATH-BED | 203 |
| XI. | THE CONFESSION | 219 |
| XII. | THE CONFESSION—(*continued*) | 241 |
| XIII. | THE RECURRENCE OF A PHENOMENON | 274 |
| XIV. | AN HISTORICAL ERROR | 298 |
| XV. | CONCLUSION | 312 |

# AT HER MERCY.

## CHAPTER I.

"WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A GOD-BE-WITH-YOU."

MR. HULET received Evy's account of her interview with Mrs. Storks with mingled feelings; he was distressed that she had given up what promised to be a happy home, but he could not conceal from her his joy that she had refused it.

"Not but that it would have been better on the whole, Evy, that you should have

left me," sighed he, "for then my troubles would have been the sooner over."

"The sooner over! How so, uncle?" she had asked with unfeigned surprise.

"Because, without you, my darling, I should die," was his calm reply; and to see his face and hear his tone, was to believe his words. It was in truth almost impossible to recognize the fretful, but by no means infirm invalid of ten days ago, in the broken, woe-worn old man, who looked, whenever his heavy eyes fell anywhere save on his niece, as though death was indeed beckoning to him. When he heard that there was a letter for him from Mrs. Hodlin Barmby, he only said, "Indeed;" then fell back into the fit of melancholy musing from which his niece's coming had but half aroused him.

"Shall I read it to you, uncle?" asked Evy.

"No, no, I do not need that," was his strange rejoinder; "every word is burnt in on my brain."

"But, my dear uncle, you have not seen it," exclaimed Evy, her apprehensions once more excited for the old man's wits. "It is here in my hand unopened."

His eyes slowly wandered towards it, then to her, when the consciousness of her meaning seemed to flash upon him for the first time. "Yes, yes; from Mrs. Hodlin Barmby," he murmured. "Let us hear what the good lady has to say."

Evy drew her chair closer to his, and laid her hand upon his knee to insure his attention as much as to express her love, then read as follows :—

"'Lucullus Mansion, Balcombe.

"'My dear Mr. Hulet,—My husband and myself have heard with great regret that a severe pecuniary misfortune has happened to you in addition to that do-

mestic one which has been such a source of sorrow to us all. He and I both know what it is to lose one's money, and may therefore claim to have some sympathy with you upon the matter, without offence; moreover we hope that you consider us as your sincere friends. This is all very stiff and formal, a circumstance which probably arises from my literary experience being so much confined to informing our would-be visitors that there is no room for them at the Mansion, but you must take it for granted that we feel all the kindness I may fail to express. I am a woman of business, and it is my way to come to the point. We want you and your dear niece to come and stay with us—to live with us—not as guests (for we know that that would be distressing to you), but quite in another sort of way. The fact is, my dear sir, that though I wouldn't let my husband know it (who thinks I am

Cocker himself) for fifty pounds, I have never made my accounts exactly right, for a week together, ever since I have had the management of this establishment:

> "'"Multiplication is vexation,
> Addition is as bad,
> Each little bill does trouble me,
> And practice drives me mad.'"

That last line is the truest part of the proverb, which, after all, I believe I have not quoted quite correctly. It is the practice—the continually having to work at those odious figures, which is intolerable to me; instead of making me perfect it makes me wretched. Now, dear Miss Evy, as I have happened to observe, is a first-rate arithmetician. I have asked her sometimes to check an account for me, and the way in which her eye has run up and down the columns, without even putting what you carry down on the right-hand so as not to forget it, always filled me with

admiration. Then she always found out where the mistake was, which I never can do, for the oftener I go over the thing the more errors I make; just as when mending a hole in very delicate lace, I have known folks to make half a dozen new ones. Now my proposition is that dear Miss Evy should come to Lucullus Mansion—there's a nice sitting-room on the ground floor next the garden, with a couple of bedrooms opening into it, which would just suit you two—and keep our accounts. It would not only be an immense satisfaction to me, and saving of wear and tear in the way of remorse, to see the item, "Lucifers and Sundries," in our expenditure sensibly diminished, but it would be a very considerable pecuniary saving. You would live, of course, as you have been wont to do here—pray excuse me for mentioning these details, but use is second nature, and be-

sides, it is so much better, I always think, that people should have a thorough mutual understanding upon business matters, none of that "I leave it to you, ma'am," as the cabman says to us ladies, and which always ends in our being cheated; and I would also pay Miss Evy a salary, not according to her personal merits, indeed, for it would take Mrs. Bullion to give that, but in proportion to the advantage I derive from her assistance. I write all this, my dear Mr. Hulet, upon the assumption that your pecuniary losses have been such as to render this suggestion worth your attention, and in case your dear niece may not have thought fit to accept an offer of another kind, which Mrs. Storks will make in the first instance. I dare not say she would be so happy with me as with the excellent widow; but we will do our very best to make her thoroughly at home with

us, and at home I don't think she would ever feel herself to be, except with her uncle. Above all, do not fear that she will find it incompatible to keep accounts, and also her position as a lady; for, though I have not succeeded in the former, the degradation, if any, of course, lies in the attempt to do so, and I have myself tried it these many years, without, as I hope and believe, losing that respect and consideration to which I was accustomed before I became a landlady. There is a piece of "proper pride" for you, which will make dear Miss Evy smile; I hope it will, I am sure. To win her for a moment from her sorrows would be a pleasure to me: to be able to lighten them for the future is what, next to my husband's happiness, I may honestly say, I have most at heart. And now for a piece of private information. Captain Heyton——'"

"I think Mrs. Barmby means this for your private ear, not mine," said Evy, quietly, and handing the letter over to her uncle. Taking her hand in his, and retaining it with a tender clasp, Mr. Hulet read on to himself:

"Captain Heyton has suddenly left us and will certainly not return again, there is therefore no fear of your darling Evy being distressed by meeting with him, in case you may wish to exchange your quarters at the cottage during the sale (as you will probably do) for our roof at once. I had some talk with him, though not upon that subject, upon which I cannot think without tears of regret; and he told me, to my surprise, that it is not his intention to return to Dunwich. It seems he has made up his mind for the future to reside in town. His manner was forced, and distrait to a degree which, notwithstanding

my knowledge of what had happened, was most surprising and inexplicable. I take it for granted, of course, that Miss Judith is no longer to be a resident with you; and have consequently not contemplated her in the above arrangements.

"With our united kindest regards to yourself, and my best love to dear Evy,

"I am your sincere friend,

"CATHERINE HODLIN BARMBY."

"There was no great secret to be told after all, Evy," observed Mr. Hulet, slowly, as he folded up the epistle. "Well, what do you think of our good friend Mrs. Barmby's offer?"

"It is a most kind and thoughtful one, dear uncle, and I am sure merits our best thanks," answered Evy, simply; the idea of Mr. Hulet living at Balcombe, the very place of all others where he would be most

exposed to the breath of scandal, seemed so utterly impossible to herself, that she did not understand that he was seriously putting the question to her as to whether they should accept the offer or not.

"Yes, we ought to be thankful," continued Mr. Hulet, wistfully; "for though I would much have preferred to be the bread-winner for you, my darling, than that you should work for me——"

"Oh, that is not what I was thinking of, uncle, dear," interrupted Evy; "indeed, the idea of doing something, however slight, for you, is the strongest recommendation in my eyes that the proposal possesses; Mrs. Barmby would, I am sure, be a most lenient taskmistress, and I have no doubt that I could please her, but——"

She stopped and looked at her companion, who had once more apparently sank into despondent musing, with pitiful

eyes. How could she tell him what was her real objection ?

"Captain Heyton has left Balcombe for London, where he has resolved to live in future," observed Mr. Hulet, slowly, and checking off each sentence on his fingers. "We shall be poorer, Evy, dear, even than you imagine, and this offer of a home and an income, however small, is as opportune as it is unlooked for. It is the only plan that seems to admit of our living together, and I confess, that in my selfish eyes, that consideration is paramount. Then, as to the account-keeping, that is just the sort of thing for which I am still fit for, and you need never write a figure with your own pretty fingers unless you please."

"But, uncle," reasoned Evy, driven to her wit's end for an objection, and wondering beyond measure that the one in her own mind did not also strike her com-

panion, " there is Judith; she is not a favourite with Mrs. Barmby, and——"

" I know, I know; but there will be no difficulty about that, Judith leaves us at once, for London."

" For London? But to whom is she going?"

" To Mrs. Bullion's. She had a general invitation from her, it seems, and she wrote yesterday to accept it. She will have her reply to-morrow, and if it is in the affirmative she will start forthwith. Then we shall be alone, my darling."

Pained as Evy was at Mr. Hulet's evident determination to accept Mrs. Barmby's offer, the unexpected news of Judith's departure almost counterbalanced her distress. After all, it seemed they had nowhere else to go; nor the means of living anywhere else. If her uncle confined himself to their own apartments—very retired ones, she

remembered, though with a most cheerful outlook—and did not mix with the general company at the table d'hôte, he might possibly avoid hearing the ill-natured talk of which, for his sake, she stood in such fear. And as for herself, she would try not to mind what was said by anybody—but to attend to her duties, whatever they might be, and help kind Mrs. Barmby all she could. Seeing therefore that her uncle had once more sunk into meditation, she made no further remonstrance about the matter.

At breakfast, the next morning (of which meal the two girls now partook alone) when the letters came, and one of them for Judith, Evy could hardly keep her eyes off her as she read it, seeking to gather the nature of its contents from her countenance; that it was from Mrs. Bullion, she felt sure; the question was, had that

lady expressed willingness to receive her self-invited guest. Evy was not long kept in suspense.

"I am going to town, to Mrs. Bullion's," observed Judith, quietly, as she poured out her second cup of tea. "I suppose Mr. Hulet told you that it might be so."

"Yes," answered Evy, "he did hint at something of that sort." She scarcely knew what else to say. She could not affect sorrow at her companion's departure upon her own account, and still less on that of her uncle, who had absented himself from the common meals, as she could not but conclude, from sheer disinclination to meet her companion.

What an unhappy state of things it is when the time for separation comes, and it is impossible to say, "How I shall miss you," to one of our own blood or household. Nay, when our secret thought

is, "Well, I trust we two here part for good and all."

"Yes," repeated Evy, since Judith remained silent; "uncle said you might be going. Do you make any long stay with Mrs. Bullion?"

"That is doubtful—it depends on circumstances. But one thing is certain, I shall not return hither: nor to your uncle's roof again."

Judith's tone was harsh, so much so that it seemed designed to provoke a question; but Evy took no notice. She was apprehensive that her companion wished to lead her into a discussion about her uncle, which she was resolved to avoid.

"And when are you thinking of leaving us, Judith?"

"This morning; at once," answered the other. "I ordered a fly from Balcombe to take me to the railway, expecting this

note would come—and—hark! I think I hear its wheels!"

There was certainly some wheeled carriage coming slowly down the lane that led from the high road.

"What, have you then packed and all, Judith?"

"Yes, I am quite ready. I have even made my adieux to your uncle! There is nothing to be done save to wish you good-bye, Evy."

There was a little tremor in her voice; something of tenderness or pity, very alien to it, and which softened Evy towards her. They had lived six months together, under the same roof; and they were about to part, perhaps for ever.

"I wish you all happiness, Judith; and especially where it has been denied to me, as you may have guessed or heard."

Judith bowed assent. Evy was glad she

did not speak; the breaking off of her engagement with her lover was a subject even more to be avoided with Judith than with her uncle; and it was only because she felt assured that her companion knew of that matter that she had even alluded to it.

"I suppose we shall soon hear, Judith, of your own marriage, now that you are independent, and there is no necessity for further delay?"

"I suppose so; yes," answered Judith, mechanically. She seemed to be thinking of something else, though her face—on which that pitying expression still lingered—was fixed upon her interlocutor.

"How long is it, Judith, since you have seen Mr.—— I mean your Augustus?" It struck Evy, not for the first time of course, but with greater force than it had ever done before, how singular it

was that she had never been told his surname.

"Well, I don't know; it must be many months." That was strange, too, thought Evy, for this girl not to know for certain when last she saw her lover. For her own part she remembered the very day and hour when she had parted from Captain Heyton in Dirleton Park—and as for that interview of yesterday, it seemed to her that though her days should be unhappily prolonged to the extreme limit of human existence, that its exact date would never be erased from her recollection.

"He will have a beautiful bride, whenever it may be, Judith," observed Evy. She had a genuine admiration of her companion's good looks, and to speak of them was almost the only means she had of making herself pleasant to her with sincerity. Flattery was always welcome to

her companion, yet she did not acknowledge this liitle compliment even by a smile. After an uncomfortable silence, "Well, I will go and put on my things," said Judith; and she rose and left the room to do so, while the servants brought her boxes down the stairs.

Evy remained in the drawing-room, listening at first to the tread of footsteps, but presently falling into a melancholy reverie, from which she awakened with the sense of having indulged in it for some minutes. This could scarcely have been, however, since Judith, who was generally very quick with her toilette, had not yet come downstairs. All was quiet now. There was the sound once more of a vehicle in the lane, only it seemed to grow fainter and fainter, leaving the cottage instead of approaching it. What could it mean? She opened the door; the stairs

and passage were empty; and on the gravel sweep in front, which was visible from where she stood, there was no vehicle, as she had expected to see.

"Jane, Jane," cried she, "where is Miss Judith?"

"Gone, miss," was that domestic's sententious reply.

"Gone! But she never said 'Good-bye' to me," exclaimed Evy, too astonished at this proceeding to consider the prudence of commenting upon it before one with whom, as she knew, Judith was no favourite.

"Perhaps she didn't wish to, miss," was Jane's cynical rejoinder, "that is, if (as I've heard said) good-bye means 'God-be-with-you.'"

Evy did not reply, but the words of the serving-maid struck a responsive chord within her own bosom of the existence of

which she had been hitherto unconscious. Perhaps Judith was indeed her enemy, albeit, she had done nothing to deserve her hate—and had felt disinclined to make that show of affection which might have seemed incumbent upon her, at parting. Or, on the other hand, had Judith done her some wrong, the consciousness of which forbade her to receive her own good wishes? And if so, what wrong? Evy asked herself this question in vain. The materials for the true reply were happily not to be found in her own guileless nature.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE DRAINING OF THE CUP.

IT was well for Mr. Hulet in those days of trouble that the details of the approaching sale at the cottage perforce occupied his thoughts. Happy for those whom a supreme sorrow oppresses, when they have no leisure to brood upon it; when want urges them to action; when helpless mouths, which look to them to be filled, cry aloud to them for bread. For once, Lazarus has then the better of Dives; for it is only the rich who can afford to indulge in what the cynic has well called the luxury of grief.

Even the removal to Lucullus Mansion that he had left as a guest, and was now re-entering as a dependent, and to which Evy had looked forward with shuddering, as to a cup of bitterness, did not seem seriously to affect her uncle. He was even more cheerful on that occasion than he had been for days. His last act on leaving the cottage had been a singular one; he had cleared his cupboard of all its potions and medicaments, and emptied them into the sea. Evy had ventured a remonstrance upon this proceeding, upon the ground that some of the medicines were very costly.

"That is true, my dear," said he. "But as I shall not be able to afford to lay in any new supplies, I may as well get out of my extravagant habits in that way at once."

Actuated by the same motive, Mr. Hu-

let would have abandoned at his meals the use of wine, but for the manifest offence which his attempt to do so gave to the Barmbys, who loaded his private table with dainties both of food and drink. It was surprising to Evy that he gave way in this with such cheerful readiness, although she well perceived it was for her own sake that her uncle made it his study to conform in all things to the wishes of their patrons.

It seemed as though Mr. Hulet had made his plans for fitting himself for the changed circumstances of his life, and that Judith's departure had released the spring of action, and set it a-going. As for her own part, it would not have been a difficult one to fill, even if her employer had not made it easy for her with all the tender delicacy of a woman's friendship. Whatever of work she had to do was ac-

complished in her own room; and it was there, whenever it was necessary to confer with Mrs. Barmby, that their conferences were held. If Evy's position at the Mansion was that which some of her own sex did not scruple to describe as that of "a barmaid," she was a very glorified sort of a barmaid indeed. The chief drawback to it indeed was the opportunity it afforded persons to make ill-natured speeches which Evy did not hear, and which, if she had heard, so long as they referred to herself alone, she would have disregarded. Detraction would never have embarrassed her, as did the generous solicitude of her friends; but when after the sale of Mr. Hulet's effects she found their already well-furnished parlour crowded with knick-knacks that had once adorned their little drawing-room, all presents from good Mrs. Barmby, who had gone down to the cottage, note-

book and pencil in hand, to "bid for bargains" professedly upon her own account; and when, as a climax, her own pet piano was wheeled in, "with the kind regards of Mrs. General Storks," appended to the address, her heart was full indeed. Not the least welcome of their gifts was one which arrived with this characteristic note from Mr. De Coucy:—

"My dear Miss Evy,—Lest I should run the risk of seeming to put you and your good uncle under an obligation, from which I know you both shrink as the sea anemone from the finger, let me inform you that the total cost of this superficially magnificent present was exactly six and twenty shillings and sixpence. No larger sum did your respected ancestor, the executioner of his most sacred Majesty, Charles I., fetch from an undiscriminating

public, frame and all. Yours ever faithfully, "T. De Coucy."

This piece of salvage from the wreck of their household gods pleased Evy exceedingly upon her uncle's account, and indeed he received it in her presence with every show of satisfaction; yet, happening to look in upon him unexpectedly a few minutes afterwards, she found him with his head buried in his hand, and sobbing like a child. He did not observe her, and she withdrew with precipitation, but that unhappy spectacle was a revelation to her. The philosophic contentment which he had exhibited was, it was now only too evident, assumed but for her sake. Her uncle was as wretched as herself; and how should it not be so? how could she have imagined it to be otherwise, since, like herself, he had lost his all? That "all,"

it was true, had different significations; but if she had lost her lover, had he not exchanged wealth and ease for a position the most sad conceivable — dependence upon the exertions of one whom it should have been his task to shield from the least breath of adversity and trouble? The reflection troubled her, yet strengthened her all the more in her resolve to fulfil her novel duties; a salary had been attached to them, small indeed, yet out of which in time it might be possible to save sufficient to enable them to live elsewhere, alone together, and away from scenes rendered painful by association or the sense of contrast; and in that meagre hope lay what remained to her of comfort.

To "save" enough "in time," after long, long years of toil and trouble—to enable us to cease from saving, cease from toiling—is no bright vision; yet it is the

brightest vouchsafed to most of us. How others who have enough, and if, as the phrase goes, they were "to die to-morrow," could leave behind them competence for their little ones, should find cause for complaint in this world seems passing strange.

Of old, when at Lucullus Mansion, it had appeared quite natural to Evy to have what she required for the asking, or even before it; to take no thought for the morrow, to welcome her pleasures as they came without surprise. But now she wondered at herself for having been so unconscious of prosperity and so unthankful for it. Her duties, as we have said, were light, and by no means degrading or even distasteful. She had true-hearted friends, in whose conduct towards her could be discerned no change, save an increased kindliness of manner—a more

delicate solicitude to please and not to hurt; yet companionship with them had lost its ease for them, its charm for her. Her life seemed to be cut off from theirs; and to have nothing in common with it. She had hitherto had no conception of the immense chasm which lies between the Rich and the Poor. As a social fact—that is in connection with friendship, sympathy, and the like—she had of old even denied its existence. She had pictured to herself, if any of her own acquaintances should suffer from loss of fortune, how she would, in all relations with herself, at least, compel them to forget it. But she now perceived that that would have been impossible. She examined the matter with some interest, for her own sorrow was far too deep upon another account to permit this change to affect her very poignantly, and noticed with a melancholy surprise

that so it was. Her friends had not withdrawn from her, nor was she conscious of having shrunk from them; there was an affectionate esteem on both sides, even stronger than before, and, on one side, a most heartfelt gratitude. But friendship, in the social acceptation of the term, had vanished altogether. With persons not her friends, and yet who perhaps desired to be so, Evy now began to open a new relation; for the first time in her life she learnt what it is to be patronized. Some of the female visitors at Lucullus Mansion having experienced considerable interest in the very lady-like and modest young person who seemed to assist Mrs. Barmby, but whose position in the establishment they could not exactly understand, they were good enough to express it. This was not very pleasant, but it was endurable, except where curiosity concerning

"that sad affair of your poor aunt" mingled with their sympathies. The questions that some of these people—people with whom she had never exchanged half a dozen words even—put to Evy were wonderful in their impertinence, and such as "you would never believe had you read them in a book." One good lady broke into Evy's sitting-room one morning, when Mr. Hulet happened to have gone out for a solitary walk, with the avowed purpose of cross-examining the poor girl, and "hearing the whole story of that inquest from beginning to end;" and she even gave her reasons for so doing. "I go about a good deal, my dear, and wish, *for your own sakes*, to have the true version of the affair as it really took place; people are so scandalous and so reckless in their assertions that I should like to feel myself in a posi-

tion to give them a positive contradiction."

"A contradiction to what, may I ask, madam?" inquired Evy, with indignation in her eyes and voice.

"Nay, I can't state *what*, my dear Miss Carthew, for it wouldn't be good manners; but they do say all kinds of things about your uncle—a most respectable old gentleman he *looks*, I'm sure, and apparently quite incapable of driving any one to drown herself, far less of mur——"

"Pardon me, madam," broke in the steady tones of Mrs. Hodlin Barmby, who happened most opportunely to step in at that moment, having some business on hand with Evy; "but this apartment is Miss Carthew's own. I believe you are one of our table d'hôte boarders, for whom accommodation is provided in the public reception-rooms. May I beg you in future to confine yourself to *them?*"

Whereupon the enemy had gathered up her skirts and fled in panic.

"Oh, Mrs. Barmby," sobbed poor Evy, "is it true that people say—say what that dreadful woman hinted at about my uncle?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, my darling. What *does* it signify?" she answered caressingly.

"Nay; but that is too terrible," returned Evy, with a shudder. "And fancy her coming *here* to ask of *me*, of all people——"

"My dear Evy, if you had kept a boarding-house as long as I have, you would be astonished at nothing that folks either say or do. If your uncle had been here instead of yourself, that woman would have doubtless directed her inquiries to *him*, and plumed herself upon going to the fountain-head in order to get at the rights

of the story. But don't you mind her, my dear; don't you mind her, nor, as Mr. Paragon would say, 'the likes of her.'"

For herself, Evy strove "not to mind;" but the idea of such horrible scandals floating, as it were, in the very atmosphere of what was now their "home," made her tremble for her uncle. Could nothing be done to remove him out of the reach of such evil tongues, and yet not separate him from her. Could they not live in town, for instance? Captain Heyton had taken up his residence there, it was true, and to meet him would have been agony indeed; but London was a large place. Could they not live there, and she go out as a daily governess and earn their bread? She knew something beside arithmetic; for she had been fond of study even at school, and had gone on educating herself in a small way since she had left it. Mr.

De Coucy, who had lived so much abroad, had complimented her once upon her French accent. She had a good "touch" on the piano. Could not these little gifts of hers be utilized? She would write to kind Mrs. Mellish, who had sent her such a sympathizing letter upon her aunt's decease, and ask her advice upon the matter. The rector's wife had a large acquaintance, and might know of some lady in want of such a person as herself to teach her little children for an hour or so daily.

Her distrust in her own powers would not permit her to think of taking very big pupils.

If she once got a situation of that sort it might lead to others. It was indeed but a straw of hope, but then she had nothing but straws to cling to. At all events, she would write to Mrs. Mellish; and accord-

ingly, without acquainting Mr. Hulet with her resolve, she did so. It would be easy enough to persuade him to leave Balcombe, since she had but to hint to him that her position at Lucullus Mansion was an unpleasant one.

It was only when the letter had gone that the hopelessness of anything coming of her application struck her with full force. How difficult such a situation as she sought would be to get! How unfit she might herself be found for it! What wretched remuneration was paid for such services, and how dear the cost of living was in London! Such reflections had often been uttered in her presence, when there had been nothing more interesting to talk about, no plan of pleasure to be discussed, no verse of some new poem to be languidly criticized—and what she could remember of them was not encouraging. "Wait and

Hope" is a good motto; but for Evy there was little left except to wait; to accept like a child who is bidden to "open her mouth and shut her eyes," whatever Fortune—who had already shown herself so hostile—might please to send her. No answer came from Dunwich, as indeed was to have been expected, since Evy had begged Mrs. Mellish not to write in case she had asked what was out of her power; and the days went slowly by, and then the weeks, like those which the schoolboy counts before his holidays, with this sad difference in her case, that there were no holidays in view to make them pass so slowly. One day was the counterpart of its predecessor, and the burden of each was still the dread she entertained lest, if not some such insolent intrusion as had happened to herself, some chance inquiry, or significant hint dropped in his presence,

might cause that wound to rankle in her uncle's breast, which she was well convinced was far indeed from having healed. While thus observant and sensitive of all that took place upon her relative's account, she suddenly became conscious of a change in the behaviour of those about her as respected herself. There was no intermission in the little kindnesses which Mrs. Barmby and the widow were for ever doing her, but they ceased to seek her society; their words were as friendly as ever, but they grew few and far between, and when they met it was plain that both ladies felt under some embarrassment, which she was utterly at a loss to understand. She was accustomed to the pitying glances of those visitors at the Mansion with whom she was occasionally brought into contact; but instead of this unwelcome compassion wearing out, as she had hoped

it would do, it now appeared to increase. Was her uncle dying? was the idea that first occurred to her, and sent an icy thrill to her very heart. That he was ill, and weak, and wretched, she was well aware, but did these comparatively uninterested spectators see some change in him, which had escaped her accustomed eyes, and compassionate her beforehand upon the dread bereavement that was awaiting her? She dared not ask if this was so of any one of them, but she questioned her uncle cautiously upon his health, and received what, so far as that was concerned, was a satisfactory reply. In body he had not been so well for years, he said; and since she herself lived on, it might be taken for granted that no man died of a mere breaking heart. Yet still her friends forbore to importune her, as heretofore, with their well-intentioned courtesies, or even com-

pany, and still the eyes of those less intimate rested on her for a moment, and then turned away as from one in grief too sacred for their intrusion.

To these latter, however, there was one exception in the person of Mr. Paragon. This gentleman, who, since Evy's return to Lucullus Mansion, had respected her sorrow and fallen fortunes with a quite unlooked-for delicacy, declining, as it seemed, to press his society upon her, even so much as their previous acquaintance might have excused, now sought every opportunity to address her ; ventured timidly to ask after her health and that of Mr. Hulet ; and once even went so far as to place a pony-carriage, which he had recently purchased—for what purpose not even the shrewd gossips of the Mansion could guess—at her uncle's disposal. To Evy all this seemed wholly inexplicable,

save on the supposition that this unhappy gentleman, who had been certainly most shamefully used, was paving the way to make inquiries about his lost love, of whom Evy had heard nothing since her departure. And, indeed, it was of Judith that he did speak to her, when an opportunity chanced to offer for a private conversation between them, which took place, as it happened, in the garden where she had once listened to the confidences of Judith herself.

"Dear Miss Carthew," said he, in a complaining voice, which he in vain endeavoured to render touching and pathetic, "I want to say something to you that is to me of great importance, and yet so conscious am I of past weakness and shortcoming, that I hardly dare to do so."

"Pray say anything you wish, Mr. Paragon," answered Evy, with a smile of

encouragement; "though I can scarcely hope to be of any service to you in the matter which, as I guess, you have in your mind."

"Oh, don't say that; oh, pray don't say that," answered Mr. Paragon, precipitately, "but only try and have patience to listen to me. You are not happy here, Miss Evy; it is impossible under the circumstances that you should be so; well, that is exactly my case. They say a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind; so I trust you will be kind to *me*."

Here he stopped, and gazed at Evy in the most imploring manner.

"If you and I were on the Morrumbidgee, in the free air of my native plains, I could address you easily enough," he continued; "but here, among these fashionable, heartless people—so different from yourself—I feel so flurried and put out;

it is such a very delicate matter I want to talk about. Oh, Miss Evy, if you were only on the Morrumbidgee!"

"I think I know what it is that embarrasses you, Mr. Paragon," said Evy, who, notwithstanding her pity for this poor awkward gentleman, found it somewhat difficult to be serious. "You wish to speak to me of Judith Mercer."

"Yes, Miss Evy, that's right; give me a helping hand like that every now and then, and then I shall get on. Well, you know how that girl kept me off and on dangling on her hook, to be pulled up and landed, or put back in the river, just as it might seem most convenient to her, don't you?"

Evy bowed and looked as grave as she could. She did not venture to speak, nor indeed was there any need to do so, since Mr. Paragon had stated the case with perfect accuracy.

"And now only think of that little villain—vixen I should say—being in love with somebody else, Miss Evy, all the while!"

"I am afraid it was so, Mr. Paragon, though at the same time it did not appear to me that she gave you such very great encouragement."

"She made up for it, however, let me tell you," answered the other, peevishly, "when it did *not* appear to you, nor to anybody else. Encouragement, indeed! I'm not blushing on my own account, I do assure you. Why, when we were alone together, she made nothing of calling me her Duck of Diamonds. What right has any girl to call a man a Duck of Diamonds, and then to leave him in the lurch like this?" and Mr. Paragon spread out his hands and threw into his face the expression of one utterly deserted and forlorn.

"Her conduct would have hurt my feelings very much, Miss Evy—I might have been a blighted man—but for one thing:" here he dropped his voice to an earnest whisper, "and now comes the point of what I have to say to you: in my heart of hearts I never cared for Judith Mercer, for the simple reason that I was in love with somebody else."

"Then it seems to me, Mr. Paragon," observed Evy, dryly, "that you were as much to blame as she."

"Not a bit of it," argued Mr. Paragon. naïvely; "for if she would have had me, she would never have known a word about it; while the person on whom I had set my affections seemed wholly out of my reach. You might say, indeed, that that was Judith's case also; but, then, I didn't plot and plan to marry the other, as she did, or behave treacherously to the person

for whom I pretended the most affectionate friendship."

"I am quite unable to follow you in all this, Mr. Paragon," said Evy, wearily. "If I can help you in anything, tell me what it is. But sorrow is apt to make us selfish, and, to speak the honest truth, I have just now so many and serious troubles of my own, that my attention is not easily won from them."

"That is only to be expected, Miss Evy. Yes, yes. Well, then, I will make my story as short as I can. Six months ago I came over from Australia with a pocketful of money and the intention of finding some honest English girl who would be willing to share it as my wife. I found two such ones. No, no; I don't mean that. I found one who would have been the very thing: beautiful as an angel, and as good; lady-like, accomplished—

the adoration of all who had the happiness of her friendship; only the misfortune was that she was engaged to somebody else. I found another—let us call her No. 2—who was, also, not without her attractions, and whom, upon the principle of half a loaf being better than no bread, I asked to become Mrs. Paragon. You know who No. 2 was. Dear Miss Evy, can you not guess who was and *is* No. 1? Now don't, *pray* don't be angry" (for Evy had risen hastily from her seat with crimson face and angry eyes), "but listen to half a dozen words of reason. I knew that in thus addressing you I was risking what little regard you might entertain for me; but, indeed, I mean no affront. It is very close on what has happened, I own. You have had very much to trouble you of late; but, then, I have no time to lose. Another man might step in at any moment,

while I keep silence out of delicacy, and rob me of the prize which I value highest in the whole lottery of life. That prize, dear Miss Evy, is your hand."

"I cannot listen to this, Mr. Paragon," replied Evy, firmly; "it is most distasteful to me. You observed, just now, that the person of whom you spoke was out of your reach. Without repeating those words in an offensive sense—that of being *above* you in any way, which is far enough, heaven knows, from being the case—I must needs say that the mutual relation between us has by no means altered in that respect."

"Not altered!" exclaimed Mr. Paragon. "Not when the man who was to have been your husband is going to be married to another girl, and that girl—Judith Mercer!"

"It is false!" cried Evy, with vehe-

mence, but with a sickness at her heart against which she strove to struggle in vain.

"Indeed, Miss Carthew, it is true. All the house here know it; the news came down from town ten days ago. I am a plain man, with no lord for my uncle; but I would scorn to act as Captain Heyton has done—he will suffer for it, however, that's one comfort; Judith will comb his hair for him—and I love you, dear Miss Evy, with all my heart, and I have five and twenty thousand pounds—— Hi! Mrs. Barmby! Hi! help here! Mrs. Storks, water! water! *Miss Carthew has fainted right away* in the garden."

## CHAPTER III.

### A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

WHEN Evy came to herself it was on the sofa in her own little sitting-room; not a sound was heard save the steady fall of summer rain upon the window, and at first she thought herself quite alone; but presently her eyes fell on a bowed figure in the chair beside her, and recognized Mr. Hulet. All others, whoever they had been who had answered Mr. Paragon's cry for assistance, had left her. She awoke with a confused sense of wrong and woe, but without recalling what

had happened, till her gaze fixed itself upon her uncle's face, and read it there.

"Bear up, my brave girl," whispered he, "he was never worthy of you."

"Hush, hush," said she, softly. "He was not to blame. I had behaved ill to him, as he thought, and he was piqued and angry. It was no one's fault."

"Yes it was, Evy; God forgive me, it was *mine*."

"What *can* you mean, uncle?"

Her question was less in answer to his words than to his looks and tone, which evinced an insupportable agony. She had thought nothing could be more terrible than to see this old man weep, but she had been mistaken; there were no tears now, but a hopeless yearning in his eyes, a blank distress upon his ghastly face, such as one might wear who prays for death, but to whom death comes not. Dejection and

despair have each their sad insignia, but there is that which makes a sadder show on the countenance of man than they; when the heart is wrung by the sense of wrong-doing for which there is no remedy—profitless remorse. It was this that Evy beheld, and though she knew it not for what it was, it shocked and terrified her.

"It is wrong, it is wicked of you, dear," she continued earnestly, "to thus reproach yourself for a misfortune that could not have been avoided. It was not your fault that your speculations failed, and made us poor. Nor is there any reason to repine—upon my account at least—at that. I am young, and strong, and have kind friends such as many a poor girl lacks."

Mr. Hulet shook his head and groaned; such arguments, she understood him to mean, were without consolation. He knew

that it was not the loss of wealth that was making his darling wretched.

"As for Captain Heyton, uncle," she went on, in a firm, quiet voice, "I am not sure that I should have been his wife in any case. He was giving up too much for me as it was. This trouble has, perhaps, been sent to save me from a selfish act, the end of which might have been disastrous, just as this wet and sullen evening has followed on a sunny morn. How bright and joyous it was!" She was thinking of the dawn of her own love, not of the day, and the memory of it, and how it had all ended, was too much for her. She suddenly broke down and burst into tears.

"Do not let us deceive ourselves, dear Evy," whispered Mr. Hulet, softly, "I know what has bruised your tender heart."

"Is it true, then, uncle," sighed Evy,

after a long silence—"I mean about Captain Heyton and Judith?"

"I believe so, darling. I heard of it from Mrs. Barmby yesterday, but we had not the courage to tell you. She had all along, it seems, had her doubts of Judith—suspected, I mean, that she wished to secure Captain Heyton for herself."

"It was a treacherous and cruel deed; may God forgive her for it," said Evy, earnestly. "How blind I was; for you, dear uncle, perceived her purpose also."

"No, no," answered Mr. Hulet, with a gesture of dissent. "I knew her for a heartless, worthless girl, but never dreamt of such deceit as this."

"Why it was you who warned me, but a few weeks back," returned Evy, with astonishment. "'Do not leave those two together,' you said."

"Did I? I had forgotten that," rejoined

Mr. Hulet, confusedly, and putting his hand up to his forehead. "You must not mind all I say at times, Evy. Judith was no favourite of mine, you know. Don't let us talk about her any more;" here he gave a little shudder, and closed the window, as though the damp affected him. "A letter came for you this afternoon, darling, when you were in the garden—here it is, with the Dunwich post-mark."

Evy took it eagerly from his hands. The address was in Mrs. Mellish's handwriting; and, though the hope was small, there *was* a hope that it might contain the proffer of another line of life, another home, however humble, than that they at present occupied. Anything now seemed better to her than to dwell among these pitying faces, in every one of which she read her own humiliation and her rival's triumph; for poor Evy was but a woman.

"What must you have thought of me, my own dear Evy," began the letter from the rector's wife, "for not having answered your last note. It was not that I had forgotten it, believe me, for I have scarce had anything else in my mind for weeks; but the fact is, I dared not write until the affair was completed about which I am to tell you. To hold out a hope to you that might not, after all, be realized, was a cruelty I could not risk with one who has had such grievous troubles as yourself; and, besides, you did say, 'If what I ask is out of your power, pray do not give yourself the pain of a reply,' and it *was* out of my power until this morning. Though your letter was marked 'private,' I was compelled to show it to two persons, of whose devotion to your interests you have, I am sure, no doubt; if you had had any, however, and could have seen how they

received the news of your calamities, it would have been soon resolved. My dear Evy, the old doctor was fairly overcome. 'What's the good of being good, parson!' he cried out to my husband, 'if things like this are allowed to happen to the best of us?' As for the rector's ejaculation, you cannot expect a jealous wife like me to repeat it to you; but it was something *tremendous*. Of course, my first notion was to ask you and Mr. Hulet to come and occupy our two little spare rooms until something permanent could be devised for you; but both the gentlemen were strong against that. 'If we had only Evy to consider about, my dear, I should start to-day and fetch her,' George had the temerity to say; 'but we must be careful how we thrust what may seem to be an obligation upon Mr. Hulet, who is a comparative stranger to us.' To this the doctor as-

sented, adding that your uncle, although a most generous and sound-hearted gentleman, was at once the most nervous and the most obstinate of men—a combination difficult to deal with, and requiring very delicate treatment. Even supposing that we could procure for your dear self any such situation as you suggested, what was to be done with your uncle was, indeed, a serious problem ; for you must not imagine that such slender payment as you would receive for teaching the young Miss Colvilles, for example — and I confess I shouldn't like to see you a governess in *that* family—and there are many like it—would do more than support yourself. 'Keep her sweet soul and body together,' said the doctor, whose language throughout was outrageous ; 'no, of course, it wouldn't ; and how that melancholy old saint'—meaning Mrs. Colville—'would snub her!'

"Well, while we were proposing this and that, the doctor suddenly jumped up with a whoop that might have done honour to an American Indian, 'I have got it,' cried he, 'and now I know why churchwardens were invented.' People who didn't know him would, of course, have taken him for a lunatic; and I confess that I was a little alarmed myself. 'Do you mean yard-long clay pipes, doctor, or real churchwardens?' asked my husband, quietly. 'I mean,' answered he, 'the flesh and blood ones. Often and often have I asked myself, 'Why was I fool enough to accept such a ridiculous office just to please Mellish?' But now I see that there was an intention in it all along. Your making me churchwarden was what Mrs. Colville would call 'a special;' for it just occurs to me that there have been two vacancies in Seymour's Home for years, and it is the vestry

—the muddle-headed, dogged monster that you so well know how to drive—that has the right of appointment!'

"This struck us both, dear Evy, as being a most fortunate thought. Seymour's Home, as you doubtless recollect, is a most pleasant place—very different from the almshouse which you used to visit so often, and where you are so sadly missed. We have, happily, so few 'decayed gentlefolks' in Dunwich that it has not been full for a long time; and the election is restricted to persons who have dwelt at least three years in the village. The rooms are small, but with a beautiful out-look. But why should I describe what you know so well? The ones that are vacant were occupied by the two Miss Simcoes, sisters of the late rector, with whom you have taken tea a score of times, and sweetened it by your presence. All *I* need say is, that whatever

candidate is elected to the privileges of Seymour's Home—which include a small annual allowance—is under no obligation to any living being but only to the memory of a good citizen of Queen Elizabeth's time, who endowed the place. To object to the appointment on that ground would be precisely the same, therefore, as though my husband should have refused to accept his fellowship at Cambridge, to which he was elected by those members of his college in whom the right of presentation was vested.

"Only *our* 'vestry'—to go on with my story—is not composed of quite the same elements; and in this lay the difficulty of our plan. My husband and the doctor, working shoulder to shoulder, could do a good deal, they thought, and at first imagined their task was easy. But only imagine the fawning meanness of some natures! Your own election was never in doubt, but

some influential members of the parish parliament objected to that of your uncle upon the ground that it would be displeasing to Lord Dirleton, because of Mr. Hulet's Republican principles! It is enough to make one a Republican to hear of such things. It is our belief that, as a matter of fact, his lordship would have been the very first to give his vote, if he had had one, in your uncle's favour; for not only is no man, as my husband says, so vile as his toadies, but Lord Dirleton has a warm and generous heart; yet we felt that any application to him would, under the circumstances, have been distasteful to your uncle. And, Evy, darling, after three weeks of argument (so called) and chatter—during which the doctor absolutely 'barked,' I am told, at some of them—we have won the day. The malcontents have been at last converted, and Mr. Angelo Hulet and Miss

Eva Carthew have been this morning unanimously elected Associates of Seymour's Home!"

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Evy, putting down the letter with a joyful cry, "you have only to say 'Yes,' and you and I can go and live together all alone at dear old Dunwich."

"To Dunwich! no, no," answered the old man, awaking from the abstraction into which, as usual, he had sunk while Evy was reading and speaking, in feeble tremulous tones—"not *now;* I cannot go there *now.*"

This unexpected refusal was a sad blow to Evy. The tidings she had just received had seemed good news indeed. The prospect of exchanging Lucullus Mansion, with its noise and bustle, and ever renewing crowds of strangers, for the calm retirement of Seymour's Home, had been in-

expressibly grateful to her. She, for her part, did not shrink, as her uncle seemed to do, from the contrast of the position they had once held in Dunwich, with that which was now offered to them. She did not anticipate that the Misses Colville, or Miss Wapshaw, or the like, would give themselves much trouble about them, even if they noticed them at all. As she had read good Mrs. Mellish's words, the quiet, quaint old garden, into which few footsteps, except those of the associates themselves, ever intruded, the stone-porched doors, over which hung jessamine and roses, and the placid country scenes on which they looked, had pictured themselves before her eyes, and the prospect of enjoying them had been as balm to her wounded heart. But all that was over now. Since the idea was distasteful to her uncle, it was no longer to be entertained.

She would go on as she had begun, as Mrs. Barmby's assistant and accountant, trying not to listen to what was whispered about their melancholy fortunes, trying not to see those glances which, though they might be meant to be pitiful, were as cruel as the tender mercies of the wicked.

"I am afraid I have disappointed you, Evy," sighed Mr. Hulet, after a little pause; "and yet Dunwich would have had its bitter memories for you, my darling."

"Perhaps so, dear uncle; you are doubtless the best judge," answered Evy, tearfully. "Wherever you choose to dwell, be sure that I shall be content so long as we are together"—here came a knock at the door; it was their old servant Jane, for whom Mrs. Hodlin had found a nominal situation in the Mansion, but who was especially attached to the service of her former employers.

"Please, sir, Mr. Paragon desires his best compliments, and hopes that Miss Evy is recovered of her indisposition."

Here was another source of annoyance, that for the moment Evy had forgotten, and from which, could Mrs. Mellish's offer have been accepted, she would have escaped as from the rest. She was not angry with Mr. Paragon, who after all had acted, if without much delicacy or good taste, by no means without good feeling. A few months ago she might have regarded his pretensions with ridicule, but the offer of himself and his twenty-five thousand pounds to a penniless girl, whom he knew to have been jilted, was something she now understood how to value. His passion was hopeless, of course — so out of all question that the declaration of it had caused her no pain except upon his own account; but it had been obviously genuine,

and his naïveté, before his terrible exposure of Judith's depravity—Evy's little stock of hard words was all for her, she had not one for Jack—had touched almost as much as it had amused her.

"Tell Mr. Paragon that I am quite recovered, Jane," said she.

"And please, ma'am," hesitated Jane, with a half glance at Mr. Hulet—as much as to say, "If master was not in the room I would say more"—"Mr. Paragon desires his best compliments, and he has had a letter by the afternoon's post, and would like to speak to you about it."

"Show Mr. Paragon in *here* to *me*," exclaimed Mr. Hulet, suddenly rising from his chair. "What does the man mean by sending messages of this kind? Evy, darling, Evy, my own sweet pet," added he, exchanging his angry tone, as the maid left the room, for one of the utmost tender-

ness, "I am afraid this roof must indeed shelter us no longer; in my selfish brooding over my own troubles I have omitted to concern myself with yours, I fear. Is it possible that this vulgar person, taking advantage of the change in your circumstances, has dared to intrude upon you with his familiarity?"

"No, no, uncle; indeed Mr. Paragon means no harm," interrupted Evy. "As for this letter, I know nothing about it, unless, indeed, it comes from Judith."

"From Judith!" echoed Mr. Hulet, quickly. "Why should that be? Why should she write to *him?*"

"Well, uncle, she professed to like him, you know—encouraged his advances, and even, as he believed—but hush! here *is* Mr. Paragon."

And at the same moment that gentleman was ushered in, looking very much

alarmed and distressed, and twisting an open letter in his hand as though he would have made a "spill" of it to light his pipe. "I hope I see Miss Carthew better; how do you find yourself, Mr. Hulet? What a wet afternoon we are having, are we not?" were his first hurried words.

It was a trying position for any man who has come to lay his heart and hand at a young woman's feet, to find her uncle in the room; and, moreover, Mr. Paragon was painfully shy.

"I am given to understand that it is on my niece's account that we are indebted for the honour of this visit, Mr. Paragon," observed Mr. Hulet, austerely. "May I ask, as her uncle and guardian, what is the nature of the confidential statement which you seem so anxious to make to her?"

"I have a letter to show her—or at least to read to her," stammered the visitor, "the contents of which will clear up certain doubts, if they should still exist in her own mind, respecting a matter in which she is gravely interested."

"Is the matter private?" inquired Mr. Hulet; "that is, such as I am not privileged to hear?"

Mr. Paragon looked appealingly at Evy.

"No, uncle, it is not," said she, with a sudden impulse. "It is true Mr. Paragon has done me the compliment of proposing to marry me; but he has had his answer, which his good sense will, I am sure, have led him to accept as final. Whatever he may have further to say to me, therefore, may be mentioned in your presence."

Never did man look more hopelessly checkmated than poor Mr. Paragon. Evy's

instinct had suggested to her the very method best adapted to put a stop to his importunities. She felt that he had come —whatever might be the pretext of his visit—to renew his offer, and that she must needs anticipate him by a decisive rejection. He was just the sort of man who declines to take a refusal if he can possibly help it, and enjoys dangling about a beloved object, although with scarce the faintest hope of success.

"It is no great consequence," stammered he; "but Judith, that is Miss Mercer, has sent me back all my presents, and the marriage is to come off at once, it seems—and—and—yes, she writes" (and here he referred to the twisted note) "that they're going to live abroad. That's all. It is very short, and not so very sweet to either of us; but I thought you'd like to know."

"Thank you, Mr. Paragon," said Evy, coldly.

She strove this time to be collected, not to give way; but it was very hard to listen to such words with calmness, although they were but the confirmation of what she had heard already. He was to be married shortly, then — almost at the very date that she herself was to have been his bride; and——

"What is it, uncle?"

"Nothing, my darling; you have been only a little faint."

"Where is Mr. Paragon?"

"He is gone, dear, long ago. And while I have been sitting here, watching my darling's colour come back into her pretty face, and thinking the matter over, I have altered my mind about refusing Mrs. Mellish's offer——"

"Oh, uncle, not for my sake, I hope," said Evy.

"No, darling; but for both our sakes. I think it will be best to go to Seymour's Home."

## CHAPTER IV.

### SEYMOUR'S HOME.

IN 1589, A.D., out of "thankfulness to heaven for the dispersion of the Spanish Armada," and also to perpetuate the memory of his wife, Frances Elizabeth, whose days had been devoted to charity, John Seymour, citizen of London and native of Dunwich, did devise and bequeath certain sums to be expended in smoothing the path of those who had fallen from good estate to poverty. The bequest had been originally considerable, and the money had so grown

with time that it had become in modern days—by reason of the restriction imposed by the testator of three years' previous residence within the bounds of Dunwich—out of all proportion to the claims made upon it; and some seventy years ago an edifice of goodly proportions had been constructed out of the funds, and denominated Seymour's Home. It was built in the Elizabethan style, perhaps in order to mark the date of the benefaction, but with improvements such as wealthy John Seymour, and even his royal mistress, could never have commanded for themselves. Time had mellowed it, but it had suffered no touch of decay. The roof showed a patchwork of moss, and gray and yellow lichen; the walls were covered with ivy, close clipped only about the quaint old casements; the stone porches were in the summer time cool bowers, into which the

roses that overhung them peeped at will, and filled them with delightful odours. The garden of Seymour's Home was not less than about forty thousand acres—that is, its front and western windows looked directly down upon that exquisite landscape called the Garden of Kent. Its own modest plot of pleasure ground was on the east of the building, and was only separated from the village street by a low stone wall. The Home had been built for the accommodation of single persons, each associate having his own little self-contained residence, with a common kitchen ; but the Miss Simcoes, to whose quarters Mr. Hulet and his niece had succeeded, had had a door cut in the wall of partition, to the very great contentment of the newcomers. For at Seymour's Home Evy Carthew and her uncle were now located. From Balcombe the former had departed

with an inexpressible sense, not of pleasure, indeed, but of relief, although it had cost her not a few tears to part with two such friends as Mrs. Hodlin Barmby and the widow; but Mr. Hulet had evinced neither regret nor satisfaction. Seeing that Evy was well contented with the change, he also was content.

Her uncle was a riddle to her in this respect as in some others. To have found such a shelter as Seymour's Home so soon after the storm that had wrecked their fortunes, and to know that it was assured to them for the future, was surely a cause for thankfulness; to be within the reach of such tried friends as Mrs. Mellish and the good doctor, and yet to be removed from the intrusion of undesired sympathy or vulgar curiosity, was more and better than they could have had the right to expect. Yet Mr. Hulet seemed to take it

all as a matter of course, acquiescing, indeed, in whatever was proposed to him, but with a melancholy pretence of interest such as would not have deceived a child. Occasionally, when the thought of his strange ways, and especially of the contradictions manifested in his talk and actions —his sudden resolve to return to Dunwich, for instance, after protesting that he would not do so, and his inexplicable statement that he had not foreseen Judith's designs with respect to Captain Heyton, when he had himself expressly warned her of them—these things, I say, caused Evy, ever and anon, to shudder with the thought that her uncle's mind was giving way under the pressure of his misfortunes; but at other times she was able to convince herself that all these symptoms were but the effect of pre-occupation. Whenever he was left alone, he would fall into what

happy childhood, to whom despondency is a marvel, terms "a brown study," brooding over she knew not what; and though he did his best to respond to her attempts to enliven him, the effort was obviously painful to him. When Mr. Mellish came, or Dr. Burne, he put on some show of cheerfulness, and his talk would even exhibit traces of its old caustic style. But his mood was apt to change with startling suddenness; and sometimes he would rise and leave the room without a word, as though his own laboured part in the conversation had become insupportable, and remain in his bedchamber until the visitor had taken his departure. One instance of this had been specially remarkable. Dr. Burne had been congratulating Evy upon the state of her uncle's health, which, singular to say, had greatly improved of late months (it was one of those strange,

but by no means unexampled cases, where mind and body do *not* react on one another); and turning to Mr. Hulet, he said laughingly, "You see the good effects, my dear sir, of getting rid of all these rubbishy drugs that you used to swear by, and which would have poisoned any man who had not, like yourself, acclimatized himself to their effects."

"Dr. Burne," replied Mr. Hulet, with dignity, and a sudden pallor of face, "if, as I have every reason to believe, you would avoid giving me offence, I entreat you not to allude to that subject; I"—here he stopped, as though repenting of an intention to say more, and simply added, "it is painful to me;" and then abruptly left the room.

"Have you any explanation of this, Evy?" inquired the doctor, raising his eyebrows; "your uncle never *used* to ob-

ject to be rallied about his medicines, even when he believed in them!"

"No, doctor, I don't understand it; but then," sighed Evy, "there are many things about dear uncle now which are equally inexplicable to me."

"He is not communicative, then, even to you?" inquired the doctor, gravely.

Evy shook her head.

"Umph. Doesn't talk much of what has happened, I suppose?"

"He never speaks of the past," replied Evy, sorrowfully, "and never thinks of anything else."

"I see; that's bad," said the doctor.

The settled melancholy, diversified only by gleams of cheerfulness, which themselves were always followed by deeper gloom, that had taken possession of her uncle, would, under other circumstances, have distressed Evy above measure, but as

it was, her solicitude and even her apprehensions upon his account had this good effect, that they did not permit her to brood over her own sorrow, else that would have been bitter indeed, and hard to bear. Within a few score yards of Seymour's Home, the woods of Dirleton were putting forth their summer glory; she never entered them, yet dark and cold was the shade they cast upon her. The year was not yet complete since she had wandered beneath their branches, the happiest of English girls, with the man she loved; and though she loved him still, dearly as then, he was lost to her for ever. Each breath of wind that stirred them whispered sad farewells, and waved to her eternal adieux. Almost every spot on which her mournful eyes could rest had its especial association with him, and was the grave of a tender joy.

Though the very landscape spoke of her lost love thus, she had no ears for the tittle-tattle of the little town, which, indeed, occupied itself vastly more with Captain Heyton and Judith than with his past relations with herself. Balcombe had been too far off for anything beyond vague rumours to reach the good folks at Dunwich concerning Evy's engagement. They had no idea that matters had gone so far between her and the captain, as they really had, even to the fixing of the wedding month.

There was a general notion that he had "thrown her over," which, some said, was only "just what they expected," and others, "just what she deserved." Mrs. Colville did not hesitate to tell Mrs. Mellish that, in her opinion, the event was in the nature of "a judgment" upon Miss Carthew for setting her affections upon

one whose position was so superior to her own. "And if I don't say a word about 'wiles,' or 'artifice,' my dear Mrs. Mellish, it is only because the girl has suffered enough. The idea of being in Seymour's Home—a mere almshouse—and almost next door to that pretty place that was once their own, must, indeed, be very trying to her."

"The Cedars" was not almost next door, but it was even more within view of "the Home" than if it had been, because the village curved at that spot. From the window of her little chamber Evy looked directly down upon the garden in which she once used to take such pride; on the lawn, with its stately and far-shadowing trees; on the terrace, fringed with the well-trimmed hedge, where the pink and white may bloomed alternately in the spring; on the fountain, that leapt and

sparkled in the sun above the basin where she used to feed her gold fish. But this sight was not so painful to Evy as Mrs. Colville imagined. The Cedars was one of the few spots that had no connection with her lover; and she regarded it, if not with philosophy, certainly without humiliation or any bitter sense of contrast.

Mrs. Mellish said but little in defence of her young friend; but it was only because she feared to say too much. If Lady Wapshaw and Mrs. Colville had but known how very painful it was to her to hear the theme discussed, they would have spoken of nothing else until there had been an open rupture between them and the rector's wife, which it was the latter's resolve, if possible, to avoid. She bore with much more equanimity their remarks upon the misfortunes of Mr. Hulet. Even to her charitable spirit there did seem a

certain propriety in the coming to grief of a man who would not "hear the Church" upon the anniversary of the martyrdom of Charles I., and who had been, also, habitually given to speak evil of dignities; but still she pitied him, and shrank from the bad taste and ruthlessness with which her visitors would paint the penalties that had befallen him. Both those ladies "felt it their duty" not to call on Evy, lest they might seem to be giving their countenance to her previous presumption; but, being above measure curious to know from trustworthy sources—persons, that is, who took their own view of affairs—how Mr. Hulet and his niece "got on" at the Home, they permitted their daughters to call. It was a question with Lady Wapshaw whether her dear Margaret should not take with her some inexpensive little gift in the shape of a bottle of elder wine or a pot of

marmalade—a scheme of benevolence into which that young woman, however, refused to enter. To do both her and the Colville girls justice, indeed, they were more tender-hearted than their mothers, and felt a considerable commiseration for Evy, sunk now so infinitely below the plane of rivalship; and it was to their credit that the embarrassment throughout their respective visits —which were not repeated—was fully as much on their own side as on that of their hostess.

And all this time not one word had Mrs. Mellish breathed to Evy concerning Captain Heyton or the girl who—as she had learnt from Mrs. Barmby—had so inexplicably taken her place in his affections. As a woman she naturally longed to hear the details of that most interesting affair, but as a true gentlewoman she had forbore to distress her young friend by any

allusion to it. At last, however, a circumstance took place which not only excused but necessitated her speaking to Evy upon the subject.

"My dear," said she, taking her accustomed seat in the stone porch one summer's morning by Evy's side, "I have brought some news, which is not good news, and yet which I should be loath for you to hear from less friendly lips than mine."

"I know what it is, dear Mrs. Mellish," answered Evy, quietly. "They are married."

"Yes, darling."

There was a long pause. Evy had been expecting the tidings for weeks; yet, now it had come, it was a shock to her bruised heart.

"They are going to ring the bells, I believe, this morning, Evy, though that depends upon Lord Dirleton's wishes. It

is not known if he will permit even that much: they have sent up to the Park to know. If I had my way, they should ring no bells."

"Why not, dear?" asked Evy, slowly.

"Well, I hardly know why not, since I have heard so little; but I feel—— Hush! there they are!"

And crashing through the still, blue summer air came the marriage bells, so near, so loud, that for a moment no other sound was heard.

"Thank God," murmured Evy. "He will have his own now, and will lose nothing by poor me."

"How is that, Evy? Although, if it pains you, do not tell me."

"It does not pain me now, dear friend," answered she, calmly. "I meant that if I had been his wife, even at the best, he would have lost house and land in gaining

me; and afterwards he might still have lost them, and through me, since but for me, he would never have married Judith. That is what has distressed me so of late weeks. I fear I must have seemed very thankless, very indifferent——"

"My dear Evy, pray do not imagine that. But, for my part, if I were in your place, I should not be so considerate about Captain Heyton. It seems to me he has behaved very ill to you. My husband says, 'I give that fellow up; I was utterly mistaken in him. He is false——'"

"Hush, hush," interrupted Evy, laying her hand upon her friend's shoulder. "Mr. Mellish is quite wrong. Captain Heyton is incapable of falsehood."

"What! not false, and yet he has married this girl," cried the rector's wife, raising her voice by reason of the tumult of the chimes, "not false to have jilted a girl like you!"

"He never jilted me. It was I who—who refused to marry him. He was a free man when he proposed to Judith."

"But why, Evy, did you refuse him? I think I can guess, however: your uncle had lost his money, and you would not let your lover, who had already given up so much for you, marry a penniless girl."

"That was one of the reasons," said Evy, quietly; "though there were others."

"Now is it not odd?" cried Mrs. Mellish triumphantly; "upon my word my husband is always right; that was the very idea that occurred to him when he heard that your engagement was broken off. 'She has done it herself,' he said. Only when the news came about Judith, then of course he altered his opinion. He thought the captain had behaved ill throughout."

"He never behaved ill at all," said Evy, firmly.

"What, not in going straight from your side, as it were, to this other girl, almost an utter stranger, and making *her* an offer. Such a man can have no heart, Evy; in my opinion, you have had a fortunate escape."

"How little you know Captain Heyton," returned Evy, with a sad smile. "He has a heart both tender and faithful. I wounded it to the quick, and he turned from me—he cared not whither. Then this girl met him. She was no stranger to him, but had striven to win him from me all along, though, blinded by my love and confidence, I had seen nothing of it."

"The girl is beautiful, I suppose."

"Yes—as a serpent, and wise as a serpent also. Heaven forgive me, but I cannot wish her happy. I can only wish that she may make her husband so."

"I think that's quite as much as can be

expected of you, my dear," said Mrs. Mellish, dryly. "What a treacherous creature this young Mrs. Heyton must be, and to behave thus to her own cousin too!"

"She was not my cousin; it was supposed she was poor Mrs. Hulet's niece, but that was not the case. She was a friendless orphan, whom that lady had adopted from a child."

"That is news indeed," returned Mrs. Mellish, thoughtfully. "It explains, too, in some sort, Lord Dirleton's consent to this marriage, which, though I did not like to say so just now, seemed to me as unlikely as in your case, though he has permitted the bells to be rung. If the girl had been of the Hulet blood he would certainly never have done so. You heard, doubtless, of his declaration that with his consent his nephew should never marry into a 'regicide family,' a very ridiculous

objection, it is true, but then he always sticks by his word. He is very fond of his nephew, you see, and, however unwelcome this match may have been to him, it has given the old lord an opportunity for reconciliation. I have been told that Mrs. Heyton has a great deal of money. Is that so ?"

"Yes ; my aunt left her a considerable sum, I believe."

"What! and did she not offer to help your uncle in any way ?"

"Oh, no ; nor would he have taken anything from her hand ; he could not bring himself to like her."

"And quite right, too," remarked Mrs. Mellish, approvingly. "I hope the old lord won't like her when she comes down here."

"She will hardly do that, I imagine," said Evy, the remembrance of Judith's

cowardice in leaving the cottage without venturing to bid her farewell recurring to her. If the sense of wrong intended had thus stung her rival's conscience, how much more should the sense of wrong committed do so? No; Judith would never come to Dunwich while her uncle and herself were at Seymour's Home.

"Nay; depend on it, she *will* come if she can—that is, if Lord Dirleton asks her, which is naturally what she is doing her best to induce him to do," argued Mrs. Mellish. "The bride and bridegroom are not going to reside abroad, at all events, as was originally intended, which looks significant. Moreover, the very delay in their marriage, for it was spoken of months ago as being immediate, seems to suggest that overtures of reconciliation have been made; at least, that is Dr. Burne's view, who knows the old lord better than any of

us. His opinion is, if Lord Dirleton has given his consent to the marriage at all, which it now seems he has done, that Captain and Mrs. Heyton will very soon be at Dunwich Park."

"I think not," said Evy, quietly, as her visitor rose to depart; but her heart was sick within her. She was not afraid of meeting Judith in the least. It was Judith who would shrink from meeting *her*, rather; but the thought of seeing the two *together*—as sometimes in the street, in church, or elsewhere, she was sure to do —as husband and wife, that was wormwood indeed.

## CHAPTER V.

### A SCRAP OF NOTE PAPER.

CALM and without event went on the days at Dunwich for Evy; calmer, even, than they had done during her prosperity at the Cedars; invitations to dinner, rare even at that time, had now altogether ceased—it would have been so very "incongruous" to invite people out of Seymour's Home—and one or two requests for the pleasure of her company in the evening from persons desirous, at any sacrifice to "congruity," to hear her story, if possible, from her own

lips, having been civilly declined, she was importuned to partake of such hospitalities no more. Occasionally, only, she spent a few hours at the Rectory, when Mrs. Mellish and her husband were quite "by themselves," for Mr. Hulet could not be induced to accompany her, and Evy did not like to leave him alone. She had those never-failing companions—her music and her books, however; nor did she omit to visit, as in the old days, the poor folks in the almshouse opposite, although, since she had nought to give, they were no longer her pensioners. With a good conscience and good health, freedom from the pressure of actual want and of anxiety for those who are dear to us, it is not, perhaps, possible to be unhappy. At all events, with such peace and quiet as she found in her present position, Evy felt content, and was very grateful for them.

The thought, alone, that Captain Heyton and his bride might presently visit Dunwich, and even take up their residence at the Park, at times overshadowed her days, which, although without sunshine, had a calm and subdued light that suited her wounded spirit well enough. Whenever his name was mentioned, or that of Judith, a pang went through her that showed how little her wound was healed, and she could not avoid hearing of them. Even those who were studious to avoid the subject in her presence, would suddenly enter upon it unawares—a proof how much it occupied their talk elsewhere. Indeed, all Dunwich was talking of the newly-married couple, exchanging surmises as to how they would get on in time with the old lord, who was at present understood to have declined to receive them, or retailing choice pieces of information upon the best

(anonymous) authority. No one who has not lived in a small country town, with a local magnate attached to it, can conceive what a magnet he is.

Of those decayed gentry who shared the advantages of Seymour's Home with Mr. Hulet and his niece we have hitherto said nothing. These were but two in number: the one a half-pay naval lieutenant, who had been present at the battle of the Nile, which had been his single topic of conversation for the last half century. This old hero was almost stone deaf; and, if you spoke to him—no matter on what subject—it was ten to one but his wrinkled face would light up with a look of misdirected intelligence, and he would answer, "Ay, Aboukir; I was there, sir."

The other tenant of the place—a Mrs. Sanboy, the widow of a Dunwich surgeon,

who had been Dr. Burne's senior partner—was even more ancient than the Lieutenant, and might be almost said to be in a fossil state. Still she got about on sunny afternoons by the help of her horn-topped stick, and expressed her views, which had, mostly, reference to the probable instability of the Thames Tunnel, the last achievement of human skill to which her memory, properly so called, attached itself. Of what had happened since in the world she had only the vaguest notions.

It had been the fixed resolve of Evy, upon coming to the "Home," to divorce herself, as much as possible, from the society of their fellow-lodgers; gossip, always distasteful to her, had become a thing to be dreaded as well as hated, and she would have endured not only complete isolation (for that would have been welcome), but even the implication of churl-

ishness, rather than have submitted to it. But finding the occupants of Seymour's Home to be such as they were, it was only in accordance with her pitiful and tender nature that she should have made friends with them. Mrs. Sanboy, who had not lost her hearing, though articulate speech was for the most part a dead letter to her, was often asked into Evy's little parlour to hear her play; or she would instigate her uncle to invite Lieutenant Crewkerne, who would gladly sacrifice his pipe to engage Evy at a game of draughts, of which he was particularly fond, perhaps as having some distant affinity to naval manœuvres. At all events, when he won a game, the old fellow was accustomed to give a British cheer in a very thin low voice, and cry, "Aboukir," as though some parallel had been established in his own mind between the two victories.

Those two guests were never asked on the same evening, because they were not upon terms—one cannot say "upon speaking terms," because speaking was almost an impossibility between them — with one another. They had quarrelled on their first arrival at the Home, about thirty years ago, on a great culinary question—as to who had the first right to the use of the kettle in the common kitchen—and the breach had never been healed. Mrs. Sanboy displayed her hostility by hinting that the Lieutenant, doubtless by means of engines of war, such as his profession made ready to his hand, was the chief cause of the fracture of the Thames Tunnel; and the Lieutenant retorted by expressing his conviction that Mrs. Sanboy was by birth a Frenchwoman, and therefore a sworn enemy to the country; this accusation was the more gratuitous since

he founded it upon her accent, which he pronounced to be foreign, a circumstance whereof, considering his infirmity, he was scarcely in a position to judge.

Even to these two persons whom the sea of life had, as it were, left stranded, its ebb or flow no more disturbing them, and whom Death itself had apparently forgotten, even to them, in some mysterious manner, came news from time to time concerning the great house of Heyton. They knew dimly that Evy had at one period been spoken of as the Captain's choice; and this of course intensified their interest in the family. On the late tremendous occasion of the bell-ringing, Mrs. Sanboy had almost effected a reconciliation with the Lieutenant, in spite of herself, so devoured had she been with curiosity, and having no one at the moment at hand save him of whom to inquire the cause of such re-

joicing; the sudden recollection that he was stone deaf had, however, saved her from this exhibition of weakness, and she had waited for an informant in the person of Evy herself, and thereby preserved her dignity and animosity both intact. Her intelligence, however, was not equal to the comprehension that the subject was a painful one to her young friend, and of course there had been nothing in the latter's manner to make her feel it. The Lieutenant, on the other hand, avoided the topic with scrupulous delicacy. It was his habit, as is the wont of aged persons—as though they would fain see as much as possible of that world from which they must so soon depart—to rise betimes and take his morning walk before the rest of Dunwich was astir; and on his way back to breakfast he would stop and chat with such of the neighbours as, through long habit, were

able to make themselves intelligible to him.

On one September morning Evy chanced to be in that little garden of the Home, in which, because it opened on the street, she seldom set foot except at some such early hour, and met the Lieutenant on his return. She noticed he did not reply to her "Good morning" with his usual cheerful smile, and also that he looked troubled.

"What is the matter, Lieutenant?" inquired she, kindly.

He could generally tell by the motion of her lips what she was saying to him; and had long given up replying to her, as he always did to those with whom he was less familiar, "Ay, Aboukir;" but on this occasion he seemed to be perplexed as to her meaning.

"You will come to-night, we hope, my uncle bids me say, Mr. Crewkerne, and give me my revenge at draughts."

But the Lieutenant shook his head; not with the motion that signified ignorance of her meaning, but another, which indicated negation and something more.

"I am *so* sorry," said he, gently; "*so* sorry;" and then tottered away, quite at a great pace for him, to his own quarters across the little court.

"The Lieutenant is not well," thought Evy; "I must get Dr. Burne to look at him;" and then went in to make her uncle's breakfast. She had a letter from Mrs. Storks that morning, full of kindliness and general chat, which occupied her during the meal; and according to custom, in such cases, she read out such portions of it to her uncle as she thought might interest him; but he seemed less inclined to take notice of such matters even than usual. His face was not so abstracted in its expression as was often the

case, but twitched and worked with nervous excitement as she had seen it do but once before—on the morning of her aunt's disappearance from the cottage.

"Have you had any news this morning, uncle dear?" inquired Evy cheerfully (for she was always careful to conceal from him that his behaviour had any depressing effect upon herself). "I saw you had quite a batch of correspondence."

"No, dear, no; no news," answered he quickly. "A letter from Mr. De Coucy, asking after you very kindly, and one from Mr. Paragon, notifying that he has sent me three brace of partridges—very good of him, I'm sure."

Poor Mr. Paragon! Perhaps he thought there was a chance for him still, which a little present of game would make no worse, and would, at all events, suggest the fact of his existence. As for Mr. De

Coucy, a word from him was always welcome to them both.

"I fancied you had more than two letters," said Evy, not with any particular curiosity, but rather to draw her uncle into talk, which Dr. Burne had recommended her to do.

"No, darling, I have but these two; would you not like to read them?" And, rising quickly from the table, he placed them in her hand and passed out into the stone porch, where it was her custom to join him after the arrangements of the household were completed, and closed the door behind him.

Evy sighed; the letters had little attraction for her, kind as both writers were in their way, and one of them a friend she valued very highly; she reflected how small had been the healing effect of time upon her uncle; that though all these

months had passed since their calamity had befallen them, how melancholy and abstracted he was. Presently some one tapped at the casement that opened upon the court-yard. She looked up and saw Mrs. Sanboy, her white face close to the pane, and exhibiting traces of unusual excitement. She piqued herself on never entering their apartment without a special invitation, and such familiar conduct was wholly unprecedented. At any other time, Evy would have smiled at such an intrusion, but just now she could not have welcomed any visitor; much more the poor wandering-witted lady, whose powers of speech had by no means fled with her ideas. She felt that morning that her place was with her uncle, and with him only. "They have patched it up," exclaimed Mrs. Sanboy in her thin shrill voice, and gesticulating like an impassioned semaphore.

Evy nodded assent. The poor lady was doubtless speaking of her favourite topic, the Thames Tunnel, into which the river had broken at the time that her own faculties had given way under the pressure of the tide of time.

"They have patched it up," she repeated. "They might just as well have done it at once, instead of taking all this time."

"Yes, yes," answered Evy, wearily, and with such an air of pre-occupation that no one short of Mrs. Sanboy could have failed to see she wished to be alone. But this good lady was of a persevering nature, and besides, a topic of amazing interest was seething within her, and demanding to be discussed.

"May I come in out of the rain—it's raining—and talk about it?" inquired she, piteously.

"No, Mrs. Sanboy; not just now; I have some business to talk over with my uncle;" and since even that statement did not seem to have the desired effect, for Mrs. Sanboy still continued her gesticulations, Evy suited the action to the word, and joined her uncle in the porch. He was sitting in his usual place at the end remote from the house, with his face buried in his hands, and seemingly quite unconscious of the autumn rain which was driving in upon his bare head.

"Uncle!"

Mr. Hulet looked up with a start that was also a shudder.

"My dear," cried he, "you gave me quite a fright. I did not expect to see you here for the next half-hour."

"Do you know, uncle, that you are sitting in the rain?" remarked she, softly. "Had you not better come indoors?"

"No, dear, no; I like the air. There" —here he changed his place to one nearer the door—"I am under shelter now; there is room for us both, my darling; sit you down; since you *are* come, it is just as well I should tell you what I have to say at once. You saw I was troubled at breakfast time, did you not, dear—did you not, pet?"

It was plain that what he had to say was not of a pleasant kind: a something not easily spoken, and which required choosing of words.

"Yes, uncle, I noticed that."

"Of course you did; you notice everything! you take such thought and care about me, and everybody, indeed, except yourself. Yes, that is my own Evy all over."

He had got her little hand in his, and was patting and caressing it, yet, with his

face averted from her own, and gazing out into the misty air, in which some small white fragments, as of a torn letter, were whirling; there were one or two also on the bench and on the floor.

"If people are good, it is said that they are happy even in this world," continued the old man; "and yet you are not happy at Dunwich, my child, are you?"

"I am quite as happy as I deserve to be, uncle, no doubt," answered she, smiling, "though perhaps not so happy as you would have me. If I could only see you getting better—I mean more cheerful—then I should have little to wish for."

"Yes; well I will try to be, dear, I will try to be; but the place depresses me. I think, my darling, that we must leave it—yes—and go somewhere else."

"Go somewhere else? Leave Seymour's Home? Oh, uncle, where can we

go? Surely, surely, we shall never find so quiet and pleasant a spot as this; and after all the pains and trouble that our friends have been at to secure it for us—and how are we to live, or even to remove elsewhere, without the means——"

"I have some money, darling; yes, some money," answered he, in tones he in vain endeavoured to render assuring, and patting her hand nervously with his fingers; "and at the worst the Barmbys will be only too glad to have us back again."

"Go back to Lucullus Mansion! Indeed, uncle, dear, I should not like that. Why what can have caused you to take this sudden dislike to Dunwich?"

"It is not that, Evy; but something has happened which will render it distasteful to us both—but especially to you. Captain Heyton and—and—that woman are coming

to the Park next week, for good—to live there."

Then Evy knew what Mrs. Sanboy had meant by saying that "they had patched it up;" the quarrel, or the estrangement between the old lord and his nephew no longer existed, and the young heir was coming home. Now she knew why the old lieutenant had looked at her so pitifully that morning, and had said, "I am *so* sorry, *so* sorry." For the moment she felt stunned and dizzy: she had tried to convince herself that this very thing which had happened must needs have taken place sooner or later: it was, indeed, only a consequence of the reconciliation, which she herself had earnestly wished for, between Lord Dirleton and his nephew; and yet she had somehow put it from her, as an occurrence at worst in the far-distant future. Now it had come to pass, or, at least, was close at

hand, her strength was not equal to bear it, and she burst into tears.

"Think over it, darling; think over it, my pet," continued Mr. Hulet, tenderly, "and I am sure you will come round to my opinion that we must needs go. You had better be alone, I know; I felt that myself just now when I was making up my own mind. I will come back again in ten minutes or so, and then we can discuss the matter."

It was kind and thoughtful of him to go, and a great relief to her. The bitterness of her sorrow was such, that a witness of it—however sympathizing—would have been intolerable. Her affection for her old lover was unhappily as strong as ever, though not, perhaps, of the same kind as it had been, when it was lawful for her to love him. That love like hers should suddenly cease, from any cause, even

though it were the cruelty and unfaithfulness of the object, was indeed impossible ; and Jack had been neither cruel nor faithless. He had loved her always, and would have married her, but for her own rejection of him—which must have seemed cruel and faithless too : his marriage with Judith she well understood had arisen from pique—that is from disappointment mingled with no unreasonable indignation against herself ; and she had forgiven him for it. But to see him as Judith's husband was a spectacle that it would be hard indeed to look upon, and the idea of which wrung her very heartstrings. That it was not of his own will that he was coming to the Park she felt convinced ; not even to be Lord Dirleton's heir would he have visited Dunwich, where he must be aware that she was living, in humble retirement, and endeavouring—though, alas, in vain !—

to forget him. He knew she loved him still, even though she had given him up, as he imagined, with insufficient cause. No; it was Judith who had urged him on to come, in order that she might assume the great position for which she had schemed and plotted from the first. But what was this? A scrap of written paper that she had taken up mechanically, and was folding and unfolding, as we are wont to do when weighty cares oppress us, and something awaits our decision to which we know not how to reply. A scrap of paper only, one of a hundred others into which some note had been torn by Mr. Hulet, and with four unmeaning words upon it, two under two, with no sort of connection between them,

"*want money—*
*you must—*"

There was nothing surely in these words to

excite at first such surprise, and presently such indignation, as Evy's gentle face exhibited. Nothing in the words. No; it was the handwriting that thus affected her; for she recognized it as that of Judith.

And how came it that Judith Mercer, nay, far stranger, that Judith Heyton, should be in correspondence with Uncle Angelo?

## CHAPTER VI.

### UNDER HER THUMB.

HAT could it mean—what could it portend—that the woman of all others in the world who had shown herself to be Mr. Hulet's enemy, and whom he himself seemed to shrink from and avoid like a pestilence, should have written him a letter? Evy strove, though it was hard to do so, to put herself and her own wrongs out of the question and regard the matter as respected her uncle only. In the first place, what was the meaning of this mention of money?

Was it possible that Judith had offered them pecuniary assistance? If this had been done at the time when their misfortunes had occurred there would have been nothing unseemly, nor, considering the source from which she had derived her wealth, even surprising in such a proposal, although at that very time Evy well remembered her uncle's passionate exclamation of disgust at the notion of receiving such assistance. But that *now*, after the cruel treachery which she had exhibited, Judith should venture to insult them both by a pecuniary gift was a reflection that brought the colour to Evy's very forehead. And yet, what context could these words have which did not imply as much? Moreover, had not her uncle mentioned, but a few minutes ago, that he had the means of moving from Dunwich, if not of living elsewhere. And who could have

supplied those means, or offered to do so, but Judith herself? Doubtless, if Mr. Hulet had stooped, or showed an inclination to do so, to accept help from such a hand, it was for her own sake. Deep as was her indignation at such an idea, even in that supreme moment of humiliation and shame, she forbore to think harshly of her uncle. At the very worst, he had only been mistaken, weak, and fond; he had judged that the presence of Captain Heyton and his wife at Dunwich would be insupportable to her, and at all costs—at the sacrifice even of self-respect—he had decided to remove her from their neighbourhood. She had only to tell him how entirely he had misread her feelings—what pain and shame he was inflicting upon her by such a course of conduct—and he would cast back this insulting gift in the teeth of the giver.

He was returning for her decision even now; she heard his quick, yet faltering, step coming through the parlour, and his hesitating hand upon the door, and had but just time to cast the piece of paper on the floor, when he once more stood before her.

"Well, my darling; you have thought it over?" said he, tenderly.

"Yes, uncle."

There was something in her tone, not only of calmness and decision, but of rigidity, which at once attracted his notice. He looked at her with anxiety, almost with alarm, ere he continued—

"I knew it must be so, love. We could not remain here, of course, now the Heytons have returned. It would be most painful for you—for both of us, indeed—and not, in fact, in good taste——"

Evy was thunderstruck.

"Uncle Angelo, you astonish me," cried she. "Whose fault is it that they are coming here? Not ours, but theirs!"

"It is their home, Evy."

"And is not this *our* home?—as much our home as Dunwich Park is Judith's?"

A spasm passed across the old man's face, as she had noticed it to do before at the mention of that name. He opened his mouth to speak; but no words came.

"Besides, uncle," continued she, "you knew as much as that when you agreed to come here."

"She——they had decided to live abroad, you know," gasped he. "I never thought that the old lord would have received them."

"That may be so; but it was always liable to happen. We have ourselves, of late, been expecting nothing less; and yet until this morning you have never spoken

of our being driven away from hence by such an event. Have you any reason, uncle, for this sudden purpose beyond the tender solicitude which I know you always feel upon my account?"

"Yes, Evy, yes," answered the old man nervously. "I consult my own feelings also when I say that it is best to leave this place."

"What, to give up our home, our means of existence—I say nothing of our self-respect, of the moral cowardice which such an act implies——"

"Hush, hush, dear!" interrupted Mr. Hulet, hurriedly. "You are going too fast. We are not without means; I possess—or, at least, I can procure sufficient money to live elsewhere, humbly, it is true, but——"

"But from whom?" broke in Evy, with indignation. "Is it possible, Uncle Angelo, that you can stoop to accept such aid as

has been offered you this morning?" Here he raised his hand appealingly, and gazed at her with such a deprecating air, as at any other time would have melted her heart within her; but the tide of her feelings was too strong, and hurried her away. "See, I found this on the floor"—here she picked up the scrap of paper that she had thrown down as he entered the porch—a piece of a letter in Judith's hand;

*"you shall have it—*
*leave Dunwich—"*

"No, this is not the same, but its fellow; the other was"—here she picked that up also, and fitted the two together—"Great heaven! what *does* this mean? *Want money—you shall have it, but you must leave Dunwich.* Does she dare to *threaten* us, then? Is this infamous girl, not content with her falsehood and treachery, bent on

driving us from the poor home that charity has given us, because she feels our presence here a reproach to her?"

"Yes, Evy, yes," was the old man's unexpected reply.

He had sunk down shuddering upon the opposite bench, with an expression of helpless despondency. "When she commands I must needs obey her."

His tone was not one of mere deprecation nor even of shame; its abject degradation and despair froze Evy's blood within her. She had long suspected, as we know, that Judith was in possession of some fact that led her to believe—and the disclosure of which might lead others to do so—that the late Mrs. Hulet had died by her own hand; was it possible that she was holding this over the widower *in terrorem*, and that he, though conscious of his own innocence, was submitting through

fear of public opinion to ignominious terms of her dictation? When she called to mind Judith's words, at the moment when she was about to give her evidence before the coroner; the conversation she had overheard between her and Mr. Hulet in the garden; the insolent independence of Judith's manner towards her uncle after his wife's death; and finally that remaining sentence she had just read, and of which she had now no difficulty in guessing the completion——"if you want money you shall have it, but you must leave Dunwich."

All these things convinced her that her unhappy uncle's sensitiveness to opinion, and perhaps remorse for his matrimonial disagreements, had rendered him a prey to Judith, and that he did not dare to brave a revelation—which though it might be founded on a mistake (and Evy firmly

believed that it *was* so), yet for him would have all the damning force of fact. Evy's indignation against Judith was excessive. She was resolved, if arguments of hers could effect it, that her uncle should not budge an inch at her rival's insolent command, but she foresaw that the task of persuasion would be difficult. The first thing to be done was, plainly, to discover, if possible, the limits of this woman's power over him.

"Dear Uncle Angelo," said she, in quiet but earnest tones, "when you tell me that you must needs obey Judith, I cannot but conclude that she has taken some cruel advantage of you. I am quite sure that it is not *right* that you should be in a position of subserviency to any such person. Now what is not *right*, we ought not, no matter what sacrifice is entailed upon us by resistance, to endure."

He shook his head and groaned—

"Alas! there is no help for it, Evy."

"Nay, there is always help against wrong-doers, if we ask it of God," answered Evy, gently; "and He often sends it through very humble instruments. If you would give me your confidence, dear uncle, in this sad matter, perhaps even my poor wits might be of service to you. There must be *some* means of extrication from the net which this woman has so craftily cast about you; you cannot *deserve* to be her slave, you know."

"You are wrong, my poor child," groaned the old man; "I do deserve it. Would to heaven that I could say that I did not."

This was no little shock to Evy; her mind had hitherto refused to credit her uncle with actual blame with respect to his wife's death, whatever of petulant impatience he might have to answer for in his

conduct towards her; but this confession that he "deserved" to be in the power of Judith Mercer argued something far more serious and deplorable. At the same time she knew him to have a very tender conscience in all things relating to the event in question, and it was quite possible that he might be taking an exaggerated view of what had, after all, been but a weakness.

"Of our own deserts, Uncle Angelo," pleaded she, "we are few of us good judges. Most of us, it is true, think ourselves better than we are, but others, through sensitiveness, or on account of some calamity that has accidentally occurred through their mere errors, are unnecessarily remorseful."

Here he lifted up his face to look at her; she fancied that a little light was gleaming through the gloom that overpowered it; was it possible that her words had let it in?

"I have heard Mr. Mellish say, dear uncle," continued she, earnestly, and watching him with keen attention, "that though we cannot exaggerate our sins to God, it is very easy to do so to ourselves; that there is such a thing as being too self-conscious. At all events, of one thing we may be certain, that base persons who have come to the knowledge of our sins or weaknesses, and who are our enemies, will exaggerate them for us, and do their best to get us punished for them, or still worse, if they have the chance, will turn such knowledge to their own advantage by the menace of disclosing it."

Mr. Hulet shuddered and closed his eyes. That she was on the right tack she felt convinced. It was plain, indeed, that her words had little comfort for him; but to comfort him was not so much her object as to awaken his sense of self-respect, and

to rouse him to resistance ; to drag him, as it were, from beneath the wheels of degradation, and place him on his feet, erect, if not defiant.

"I have heard and read, dear Uncle Angelo," continued she, "that of all weaknesses, that is the most calamitous which induces us, through fear of the menaces of such wicked persons, to become their slaves ; for though the error which has placed us in their power may be in reality venial, we are often rendered culpable by obedience to their cruel caprices : and in any case, that it is better to let them do their worst at first—to let them divulge what they know—than to live on in an abject and submissive state ; the extortionate interest, as it were, which we pay for a debt that is never discharged, and for which we are always liable."

"Evy, Evy, do not torture me," ex-

claimed Mr. Hulet, suddenly: "all this is true, as none—God help me—can be more aware of than myself; but I am bound hand and foot, and cannot stir a finger save by another's leave. Death, Death only can release me from her bonds, and Death would be welcome."

He was silent for a moment, while Evy looked at him silently too, with terrified amazement. "Come, child," cried he, starting to his feet, "we are losing time, and this woman, who is more peremptory than any crowned tyrant, bids us depart quickly."

His face had a vacant look, his eyes a wandering stare, that she had never observed in him before. His limbs, too, trembled, as though ague or palsy shook them.

Dreadfully alarmed, and only sustained by the thought that it was near the hour at

which Dr. Burne almost always dropped in at Seymour's Home, on his usual mornings round—staying twice as long to chat with his former patient as he had done of old when he was paid for his visits—Evy besought her companion to sit down. "If we *are* to go, dear uncle, it is certain you will not have strength to do so, if you excite yourself thus."

Moved by this entreaty, or, perhaps, because his strength was unequal to sustain him on his feet, Mr. Hulet resumed his seat.

"There is no such very great hurry, to be sure," he murmured: "we have still some days to turn about in; she will not be home till Saturday, she writes."

There was something in that spectacle of the abject submission of her unhappy uncle, in the insolence of the message quoted, and perhaps in the use of the term

"home," which Judith had applied to the place which ought to have called Evy mistress rather than herself, which roused Evy's indignation to the uttermost.

"It is a degradation to hear such words!" exclaimed she, passionately. "I love you, Uncle Angelo, more than my life, for I would lay that down to serve you, but I love honour better. Go from Dunwich if you will—for I will not believe you must—at the bidding of this worthless woman; but as for me, I will not go. She has betrayed my friendship, wronged me more than ever woman wronged her sister, but she shall not put her foot on *my* neck. And here I stay."

"Oh, Evy, Evy, you don't know what you say," answered Mr. Hulet, pleadingly; "it is *your* presence here, not mine, that she objects to; she hates you, and she dreads to look upon you."

"Then I remain here," cried Evy, firmly; "I remain here all the more to defy and daunt her."

"But the penalty," pleaded the old man, in agonized tones; "the penalty to *me*, dear Evy, if she tells my secret."

"What *is* your secret? Surely I am as safe a repository of it as she who now possesses it. What is it, uncle?"

"Don't ask me, darling; for heaven's sake don't ask me," answered he, clasping his hands imploringly; "to know it myself, and to know another knows it—even though she be one whose good opinion I value not—that is bad enough; but to think that my own Evy, my pet, my darling, should share such knowlege, and therefore no longer love me! No, no—think what you will of me—I am safe then; but tell you, Evy, I never will."

"But the penalty, uncle," urged the

wretched girl; "at least tell me the extent of that. What can the penalty be, out of fear of which you are prepared to give up this quiet home, and friends, and self-respect?"

"I'll tell you, then," groaned Mr. Hulet; "I'll whisper it in your ear, and then you'll understand that we must go, and will never speak about the dreadful thing again. You know my picture in the room yonder; our ancestor with the headsman's axe, and the poor king; he was a bad man, but he suffered cruelly for it. I am sorry I ever spoke of him as I used to do. It's a frightful thing, whether one is innocent or guilty, Evy, to be brought out on a scaffold to be put to death. *Well, that is what may happen to me!*"

"But *you* are innocent?" cried Evy, clinging to his coat, and questioning him with feverish eyes. "Oh, pray, dear uncle,

tell me—no matter what may happen—that you at least are innocent."

"Alas, Evy," groaned the old man, his chin falling forward on his breast, "I cannot say I am."

## CHAPTER VII.

### PROSTRATE.

"LET us go: I am quite ready, let us go," were the faint but impatient words that Evy Carthew spoke, after that dreadful revelation which Mr. Hulet had made to her. She was no longer in the stone porch where she had heard it, but in her own little room in bed, though in her eagerness for flight, and solicitude for her uncle's safety, she was at first unconscious of the change of scene. Even when the kindly tones of Dr. Burne, who was sitting by

her pillow, replied to her, humouring her wandering fancy as he deemed it after his professional fashion, "Yes, yes, dear girl; and so you shall, all in good time," she did not recognize his voice, but answered, "How can you hint of delay, uncle? Let us start to-day, no matter whither, so long as we leave Dunwich." Then the door opened, and a low and broken voice inquired, "Is there any change, doctor?"

"A little, my dear Hulet," was the quiet reply. "Her speech is stronger, but her mind is still astray."

Then Evy knew that she had been ill; how ill, she could only guess from her sense of personal weakness, which was intense; the question that more interested her was, How long? How much precious time, which should have been spent in preparation for departure, had been lost through her weakness? her inability to

withstand the shock of her uncle's awful confession ?

For the actual facts of the case began to dawn upon her ; she must have fallen down, in some sort of swoon or fit, and been carried insensible to her room. Her head ached sadly, although she had a bandage of some kind about it, which felt soft and cool.

" Evy."

She opened her half-shut eyes, though with some difficulty, like one who pushes against a door that slowly " gives ;" Mr. Hulet was leaning over her with haggard, anxious face.

" Evy, darling, do you know me ?"

" Yes, uncle."

" Thank God, thank God," he murmured, " there is still something to thank God for."

" Have I been long ill, uncle ?"

"Yes, dear—lie still, lie still, my darling," added he, earnestly, as she made a piteous effort to lift her head, "or your wound will bleed afresh, and I shall lose you yet!"

"But the time, the precious time, uncle. Can I not be moved to-day?"

"Not to-day, darling; in a few days, when you are stronger."

"But did she not say she would be here on Saturday?"

"Hush, hush," he whispered: "*Dr. Burne is here, my child.* Do not be impatient, for that will only retard your recovery. She must hear of what has happened, and will make allowances."

Evy closed her eyes, and uttered a low moan. It had been wrung from her by the sharp sense of humiliation, but the doctor attributed it to another cause. "You must not talk to her any longer at

present, Hulet, she is too weak; she may be safely left now, though Mrs. Mellish is only waiting for my report to come and sit with her; in the meantime do you go to bed and get some rest, for I can see you need it."

Yes, indeed, he did need it; Evy could see that, as the old man once more bent down to kiss the cheek she had not the strength to turn towards him. And yet in his white and wasted features there was a look of grateful joy, that almost awoke hope within her.

"Have I been very ill?" she whispered.

"At Death's door, my darling; but thanks be to heaven the crisis is over. God has not utterly forsaken me after all."

So it was on her own poor account alone that her uncle had cause for congratulation. Other things were as they were.

The cloud was still hanging over him as before, destined to darken both their days. And what if it were to burst!

"To be brought out on a scaffold and be put to death—*that is what might happen to me.*"

These words sounded in her ears over and over again, as she lay upon her sick bed alone, with the persistency of the ticking of a clock, only to be varied at times by another sentence: "Innocent? Alas, Evy, I cannot say I am."

They were "never to speak about the dreadful thing again;" that had been agreed upon between them; but she could none the more forbear to think about it; indeed she could think of nothing else. To be put to death upon a scaffold was to be punished for Murder; no less. But had Uncle Angelo then, over whom this penalty impended, committed murder? It

was as reasonable to suppose that yonder sun, the fountain of light, to be a black and frozen mass (simply because it had a cloud upon it) as to credit one so gentle and warm-hearted as Mr. Hulet with so heinous a crime. Her common sense and experience revolted from so monstrous a supposition, and made alliance against it with her love and gratitude. On the other hand he had himself confessed his guilt. At that thought her brain was filled with fire; she seemed going mad—or, perhaps, returning to that state into which his words had driven her. And yet, when she grew calm again, she did not shrink with loathing from kind Uncle Angelo, or hold him from her, as she would have held a murderer—a man, too, who had put to death a weak, defenceless woman—at arm's length. Reason demanded that she should believe him guilty

who himself had admitted his guilt; but instinct refused to credit it. Her mind was tossed this way and that; now at the top of the wave, she felt secure of his innocence; and now again, in the trough of that sea of doubt, all was dark save for a strip of blue sky. She had adjured him to declare that he was innocent; and he had replied—and with a look of anguish she could never forget—"Alas, Evy, I cannot say I am." That was not quite the same, surely, as though he had answered, "No, Evy; I am guilty." It was but a gleam of hope, but in her darkest moments she never lost sight of it. But whether hope or fear had the mastery of her for the time, the one thought that was still uppermost and which overmastered all, was to be up and away from Dunwich; to be putting miles and miles of land or sea between her uncle and his enemy: to be

with him somewhere out of the reach and risk of that dread penalty of the law.

Presently there was a soft knock at the door, and Evy strove to cry "come in," which, to her surprise, she could not compass. Her voice, it seemed, could rise no higher than a whisper. The visitor, however, entered as though no such permission had been expected, and came and stood beside the bed-head. It was Mrs. Mellish —the very person whom above all others Evy yearned to see, and yet at the sight of her, and quite unaccountably to herself, her tears began to flow. "I am come, dear Evy," said the rector's wife, embracing her tenderly, "to keep you company a little while; but you must not excite yourself, or I must go away again."

"I am not excited, dear Mrs. Mellish, but I don't know how it is," answered Evy, piteously, "I cannot help crying."

"That is because you are so weak, my darling, after your illness. I say 'after' because, thank heaven, you have turned the corner, you know."

"What has been the matter with me?"

There was a short pause, during which Mrs. Mellish looked embarrassed. "Brain-fever, darling; it is all over now, but still you must not excite yourself by talking."

"I only want to ask a question or two on matters which are troubling me."

"Very good, darling; I will answer them, and talk to you as long as you like, but you must not talk to me; those are the doctor's orders."

"Do you think it is possible, dear Mrs. Mellish, that I shall be able to be moved from here in a few days—on Friday for instance?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't, darling,

if you can pick up a little strength. I should think it would do you good to get you on to the sofa yonder, so that you could lie close to the window and look out. Friday is this day week : you ought to be getting round by that time."

Friday is this day week! If she had heard aright, she must have been ill—insensible indeed — since Monday, then. And yet, even now, it seemed it was useless to dream of getting away from Dunwich for days to come. "Is it true that the Heytons are coming to the Park on Saturday ?"

There was another and longer pause, during which Mrs. Mellish looked more embarrassed than before.

"My dearest Evy," said she presently, "you don't know how ill you have been, nor for how long. The Heytons came last Saturday, and have been at the Park nearly a week."

"My poor uncle," murmured Evy, mechanically. What apprehensions, she was thinking, must he have suffered during that time; how terrible for him to have been dwelling in the very shadow of the hateful woman who had the power to send him to the gallows.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Mellish, "it was sad to see him, while you lay here between life and death, and never your dear self: but now he will be another man. Doctor Burne tells me that he has gone to bed for the first time since you were taken ill, and is now asleep. Your recovery, darling, will be such good news for so many people. Even old Mrs. Sanboy has been inconsolable about you, and I have nearly cracked my voice in telling the lieutenant every morning that you were much the same."

"Have you seen either of them yet—I mean the Heytons?"

"Yes, dear; they were both in church on Sunday, and, besides, the rector and I had to call at the Park, you know. I really think, dear, you have had talking enough for to-day," added Mrs. Mellish, softly; she naturally felt that this subject, above all others, was one to be avoided.

"Please to tell me about Mrs. Heyton," pleaded Evy, pitifully; "you don't know how I crave to know. How does she look? what does she say?"

"Well, she looks abominably good-looking, my darling; there is no denying that. And yet—though that goes such a great way with him, and though she is most attentive and deferential—I don't think the old lord takes to her. As for the rest of the household, I am told that they find her most peremptory and imperious; and between you and me, I think her husband has also made the same dis-

covery. The rector met him pretty coolly, I promise you."

"Not on my account, I hope," said Evy earnestly; "Captain Heyton is in no respect to be blamed."

"Hush, hush, you are not to talk, you know," put in Mrs. Mellish. "I am not going to argue with you about that, or anything else, my dear; but if the captain is not to be blamed he is certainly to be pitied. I asked my husband (who is generally right about such matters), 'Don't you think the bridegroom is henpecked?'

"'No,' said he; 'not yet; but it will come sooner or later; that woman is a termagant, and perhaps something worse.'"

"What did he mean?" asked Evy, quickly.

"I don't know exactly. One must remember that he was prejudiced against

her at starting ; but he thinks her without tenderness. There is some story of her having struck the gatekeeper's child with her riding whip for letting the gate swing back too soon, but I cannot believe it ; the child is a cripple, you know, and a woman who would do that would do anything. However, she is always on horseback, and even goes out with the Captain before breakfast, cub hunting. She is quite a Diana Vernon, they say, and clears five-barred gates. I only tell you what I hear, you know ; I saw her but for five minutes at the Park, during which she patronized me as the clergyman's wife most magnificently ; and at church, on the previous Sunday, they both looked, I noticed, though in a different way, at the Seymour's Home pew, and seemed much relieved to find that neither your uncle nor yourself were present."

"How do you mean in a different way?" inquired Evy.

"Well, you know, it may have been fancy, Evy—and it is true enough that I ought to have been thinking of something else, instead of watching them—but it seemed to me that Mrs. Heyton had made up her mind to carry off matters with a high hand. Directly she took her seat, she looked boldly down into your pew—which she could not mistake, since it has the name on it; whereas, the Captain, who looked very white, stole a furtive glance at it, as it were, and then, finding you were absent, seemed to breathe more freely; or at least the colour came back into his face. You will call me a sad gossip: but you asked me to tell you all I knew about them, Evy."

"Yes, yes, that is right; I want to know all. Do you think Mrs. Heyton has heard that I am ill?"

"Well, the Captain knows it, for he has called in person on the doctor every day to ask after you; so I conjecture that his lady does; though to be sure, on the other hand, it is possible that she may imagine you are afraid to meet her (she is insolent enough for anything), and are keeping within doors on the pretence of illness. At all events, she has not sent to inquire after you, we may be quite sure, not she," and Mrs. Mellish smiled in derisive scorn. The fact was that the rector's wife had as keen a relish for gossip as any of her sex, and had longed for months to discuss this particular topic with Evy. She had not done so, as we know, out of consideration for her feelings, but now she had received permission, and even an invitation to do so, she scarcely knew where to stop; compulsory abstinence had made her so very keen. She was by nature a partisan

—almost always it must be owned on the right side—and it gave her a genuine pleasure to paint Judith as she found her —or perhaps a trifle darker ; nor did she doubt that such a picture would be welcome to her young friend. Whatever might have been the case, in this last particular, under other circumstances, her tidings of Judith's insolence and imperiousness, and especially the idea Mrs. Mellish had thrown out, that the former might think her to be shamming—perhaps at her uncle's suggestion—as an excuse to remain at Dunwich, and thence conclude that he was defying her, filled Evy with inexpressible terror.

"If I were only to get up," moaned she, making a feeble effort to raise herself, "I am sure I should feel better ; don't you think I might get up ?"

"Oh, no, dear Evy, that is not to be

dreamt of, at least to-day. We will see what Dr. Burne says about it to-morrow; but there is certainly a great improvement."

"Yes, yes, I am a good deal stronger; and it is so kind of you to come and talk to me."

"Well, now, if you really do feel that, and you are sure it does you no harm, Evy, I should like to ask you a question—only one—upon a matter of no great importance you will say, and not a pleasant subject either, but about which I am very curious. When your poor aunt died at Balcombe, there was an inquest, was there not?"

Evy closed her eyes in assent; she could not speak, but shivered from head to foot.

"Well, there was no hitch about that

inquest, was there? The verdict was Accidental Death, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Well, so I thought;" but Mrs. Mellish's tone was by no means one of conviction; it was evident she had perceived that the subject was distasteful to her companion.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Evy, with an effort to appear indifferent.

"Oh, only from curiosity. Lady Wapshaw came to the Rectory yesterday with some stupid story about poor Mrs. Hulet. How she had been unhappy in her marriage, and so forth; and that she had *disappeared* in some mysterious manner. All nonsense, I suppose."

"Yes," said Evy. Then, after a long pause, "Lady Wapshaw has been to call at the Park, I suppose?" inquired she, wearily.

"Oh, yes, dear; so has everybody for that matter. They couldn't do otherwise, you know," was Mrs. Mellish's soothing reply. But Evy showed no sign of discontent; tired out, as it seemed, by the unwonted task, she had closed her eyes and spoke no more.

And yet Evy was not asleep. She was thinking of Lady Wapshaw and her scandal, of which she could but too well guess the origin. No better medium than her ladyship could possibly have been chosen to disseminate a malicious story. Was it Judith's plan to make Dunwich intolerable to them; or had she a worse design; was she sowing the seeds of suspicion in people's minds, in order to prepare them for the denunciation that was to come at last?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### GREAT NEWS.

ERY slowly, by a point gained here and another there, Evy Carthew began to renew her strength; but so cruel had been the ravages of sickness that she looked like one risen from the dead, or, as Dr. Burne put it (but he was very "foolish" about Evy), like a beatified saint immediately after martyrdom. What puzzled him was, since she was not about to seek the skies, why she was so desperately anxious to know when she should

be strong enough to go away from home.

"The only place you should go to, Miss Evy," said he, "if I had my will, should be your old home, the Cedars," which, as it happened, was then to be let.

Evy smiled faintly. "You are very good, doctor, to wish to have us so near you; but I am certain I shall not get well till I leave Dunwich."

"Tush, you were well enough when you lived here before; and there is the winter coming on, and no one—at least no one like you—to help me with my poor people."

"The rich ones will not regret our absence very much," sighed she, not without a little bitterness. "Except good Mr. and Mrs. Mellish, there is not one even to wish us God speed."

"Pardon me, there is one," replied the

doctor, earnestly. "Not a day has passed since he arrived in which Captain Heyton has omitted to inquire after you with his own lips."

"I was referring rather to the good folks of the village," observed Evy, trembling, but speaking very firmly; "nor did I allude to their conduct towards myself, of which, indeed, I have nothing to complain. But it does seem harsh and hard to my poor uncle, that, as Jane tells me" (for that faithful servant had accompanied them to Seymour's Home, where she was their sole retainer), "not a soul has come to see him during all his trouble upon my account. It would have been the merest Christian kindness to call and inquire, even if, as you were about to say, he would not have seen them."

"No, Evy, I was not about to say that," returned the doctor, slowly. "As to

Christian kindness, we have always been so very religious at Dunwich, that you can scarcely expect *that*, and besides—I think I must be right in telling you—there has been another reason why people have kept aloof from Mr. Hulet."

"What is that?" She knew well enough what it was, or rather to what it had reference: but she wished to learn the exact shape that these evil reports—which, like the vapour from the bottle that the fisherman in the Arabian story caught in his net, her instinct told her had been growing and darkening about them—had by this time taken.

"Well, my dear, it is nothing but some stupid lying scandal, I have no doubt; and as to the precise accusation it conveys, it is impossible to grapple with it; but of late weeks, an impression has certainly got abroad here that your uncle was in some

measure to blame for his wife's death, that he used to treat her very ill."

"That is false," interrupted Evy.

"I have no doubt, my dear, that it is all false; but then, what with our very high principles, and our sense of 'incongruity,' and our knowledge that your uncle is a Republican, and has a Regicide (who was also a member of the family) for a patron saint, that makes us believe it all true, you see. It is for the very reason that it is false, dear Evy, that I would counsel you not—at any rate just at present—to leave Dunwich. Your departure will be certainly taken as a proof of your uncle's guilt; this place, they will say, has been made 'too hot' to hold him; my earnest advice—if I could speak to him on such a subject—would be to remain here, and live this scandal down. In time, perhaps, our good folks will have something else to talk about,

even more exciting; I shouldn't wonder if they had."

"To what do you refer, doctor?" inquired Evy, mechanically, for her thoughts were occupied with another subject. "We will go to-morrow, if I have to be carried out of this," was her reflection. "Not a day longer shall my poor uncle breathe this atmosphere of lies and malice; if he comes to know that it is poisoned, it will kill him."

"Oh, I'm like the gossip in the play, my dear, I say nothing, but if there is not a flare-up at the Park some day, and before long too, I shall be very much astonished. If you were like other girls, Evy, and took a pleasure in the misfortunes of one who has behaved ill to you, I could recommend myself to you by some new 'Tales of the Hall,' I promise you. You told me that Mrs. Heyton was an orphan, but that is a

mistake, for Mr. Mellish knows her father —he spoke of him from the pulpit only yesterday."

"Her father! why who is he then?"

"The devil, my dear, no less; she is devil-born. The old lord has been ill with his gout lately, and I have seen a good deal of her, and I am certain about the parentage; I have never been treated by anybody with such insolence," continued the doctor, with indignation; "the only satisfaction to me is that I know it is upon your account."

"Upon *my* account, doctor?"

"Yes, indeed; you took it very quietly when I told you that poor Heyton comes to my house every day to ask after you; but you little guessed how he suffers for it. She has the teeth and claws and flappers of the arch-fiend himself, and uses them, I'll bet a guinea. I sometimes think she

is out of her mind; it would be a very good job for her husband if she were out of her body; I mean, as Mrs. Mellish says when any of her obsequious pensioners pop off the hooks, if the angels were to take her, of which, as I'm given to understand, there are two sorts. Well, Jack Heyton may have acted for once in his life like a fool—my impression is, he did. But he will not put up with a wife like that for long; and, I repeat, that before many weeks are out, there will be a flare-up at the Park. If your uncle will be ruled by me, Evy, he will wait here and see it."

With a nod, before which the significance of Lord Burleigh's shake of the head sank into imbecility, the doctor rose from his seat, and took his leave. It was evident to Evy, that his outbreak against Judith had not been excited merely by the

remembrance of her rudeness to himself, which must, however, have been excessive. He must have meant to hint to her that the evil reports concerning her uncle had their source in that implacable woman, whose own conduct, he hoped, would presently bring upon her general reprobation, and, consequently, discredit her scandals. That the doctor befriended her was an all-sufficient reason for Judith's dislike of him; that she should be enraged with her husband for taking any interest in her recovery was also explicable enough. But there was something that bespoke such an intensity of malice in this stirring up of the public mind against her defenceless uncle—this torturing of him while he was, as it were, tied to the stake by reason of her own incapacity to be moved, that almost deserved the doctor's epithet—devil-born.

"Well, darling, and what is the report

this morning?" inquired Mr. Hulet, entering at this moment; "for the doctor was in such a hurry, and seemed in such a temper, too, that I could scarcely get a word with him."

"The bulletin is 'convalescent,' uncle," answered she, cheerfully. "I am ready to leave Dunwich at once. This very day if you please."

"But did he really give you leave?" inquired Mr. Hulet, with anxiety.

His pale face glowed, not with pleasure, indeed, for such an expression had long been a stranger to it, but at least with pleased surprise.

"He even gave me the most excellent reasons for departure, uncle."

"Then I may positively say that we shall be away to-morrow," ejaculated Mr. Hulet, with a sigh of inexpressible relief.

"Let us go, by all means," said Evy; "but what need is there to tell others?"

"None whatever, darling; of course not."

"You said, 'may you *say* so,' uncle?" answered Evy, regarding him very steadfastly. "Is our persecutor, then, so very importunate?"

Mr. Hulet hung his head.

"She *is*, my darling. She has written to me twice already. But, if you had not been equal to it, I would not have gone. I would not have risked your life to save my own. No, no!"

"But what harm do we do her by remaining here a few days longer, or even altogether?"

"I don't know, dear; I don't know."

"She resents my presence here, whom she has so basely wronged; she is furious with her husband because he has shown

some interest in whether I should live or die——"

"I dare say, I dare say," interrupted the old man, wringing his hands. "But since you are strong enough to go away, let us do so. I have not breathed freely since she came. You will want your things packed up; you must do nothing yourself; I will ring for Jane—my darling, oh, my darling," he exclaimed passionately, "what have I done to you! For one moment's crime—one instant of besotted weakness—I have not only ruined myself, for that were nothing, but——"

"Hush, hush, dear uncle; you know we were never to speak of that; I do not wish to hear it. I have a picture of you in my mind which no stain cast by others can spot or blur; I pray you do not deface it with your own hand."

"A picture of *me*, Evy," answered he,

in a hoarse voice. "Is it that of a man broken down, disgraced, by his own selfish pride and obstinacy—sold into slavery by his own wicked act; smitten by his own cowardly hand?"

"No, dear uncle, no. That picture is like a crystal pool, into which you may yourself (no one else) thrust a frantic hand, and stir up doubts and fears, misgivings and suspicions, which for a moment may make it muddy and turbid; but presently they sink down, and all is clear again. If all the world should say it—if he himself should confess it—if I saw him upon the very scaffold doomed to die for it, I would never believe that Angelo Hulet was guilty of a crime. Calm yourself, dear uncle, do not, I pray you, do not kneel; it is most distressing to me, most shocking."

"I do not kneel to *you*, my darling," murmured the old man, "I kneel to

heaven to thank it for your words. Oh, if I dared to tell you ; but I have sworn to keep the secret ; and, besides, you could not bear to hear it, or having heard it, you could never more take this vile hand as now, or kiss my cheek ; or, if you did, you would shudder afterwards as though the stain of blood——"

"Rise, rise, uncle ; for heaven's sake, hush, there is some one at the door."

He had hardly tottered to a chair before the knock was repeated ; it was not the ordinary summons which the servant was wont to give, but had a nervous and impatient sound.

"What is it, Jane ?"

"Your bell rang, miss, I think."

"It did ; but why do you look so frightened ?"

The woman's face was indeed a scared one, and she turned it towards her master,

as if to inquire of him whether her news was to be told.

"You need not fear to speak before me," said Evy, perceiving the cause of her hesitation; "whatever tidings you may have to tell, I am quite strong enough to hear."

"Oh, miss, but this is so terrible. Mrs. Heyton—Miss Judith that was—has been thrown from her horse out hunting—and oh! Lord, she's dying."

"Dying!" echoed Evy; the shock was a very severe one, though not altogether of the nature that Jane supposed it to be. It was very terrible to reflect that this woman, of whom she had been thinking such evil, was on the brink of death; at the threshold of that Judgment-seat where no astuteness would avail her, and where she herself would one day perhaps have to take her place as witness against her; but her

immediate sensation was one of relief. The string of the millstone that hung about her uncle's neck would surely now be loosened; he would be once more a free man.

Mr. Hulet was sitting with clasped hands, gazing on the carpet with a look of stony horror. If Jane had said "your niece is dying," instead of having thus spoken of his mortal enemy, he could not have shown a more despairing face.

"You may go, Jane," said Evy, "until I ring again."

"Uncle, dear uncle, what is the matter? This is very, very shocking news, but it is not so terrible to me as to see you thus."

"Terrible! is it so terrible? How will it be, then, when the people come to see me hung?"

Had the sudden sense of enfranchisement been too much for the old man's brain? Evy had heard of such an effect

in the case of long imprisoned or enslaved men, and surely this man had been enslaved. Was Judith, then, living or dying, doomed ever to be his curse and hers?

"Listen to me, uncle, listen. If this news is true, remember you are a free man. The sword hangs no longer above your head that Judith held there."

"Not so, child, not so," answered the old man, with a haggard air; "if Judith dies—you do not understand—the sword falls of itself. Pray for her:" he turned towards Evy with passionate eagerness. "You are good, you are pure—not as I am: your prayers will be heard. Pray, then, pray that Judith Heyton may live, for when you pray for her life, Evy, you will be praying for mine."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MESSAGE.

THE good folks at Dunwich had now indeed got that "something to talk about" of which Dr. Burne had spoken, albeit the precise topic was by no means such as that gentleman had anticipated. In London nothing surprises us, nothing shocks us, for more than twenty-four hours, and then only at intervals of about a minute and a half in duration. The clubs are languid about everything.

"Second edition of the 'Times'

says St. Paul's is on fire," remarks Smith.

"The deuce it is," says Brown. "Whereabouts?"

"The dome."

"Ah, that's bad; fire burns downwards, you know."

"No, I didn't. I thought it was the other way."

"Oh, dear no; you should always light a fire from the top. Faraday, or Huxley, or somebody found that out ten years ago or so—— Hullo, here's Jones. I say, Jones, the dome of St. Paul's is on fire."

"Dear me, that's bad. Gad! what a way up the fire engines will have to pump!"

"Never thought of that," says Smith.

"They should keep them at high pressure," remarks Brown, the scientific.

"Yes, I suppose that would do it," answers Jones, wearily. "Beg pardon for yawning, but I was up late last night. How are you, Robinson? Heard the news? St. Paul's is on fire."

"You don't say so. That's just like my luck."

"How so; is it insured in your office?"

"Not *it*. But my new rooms look west. If I had kept to my old chambers another week, I should have had a capital view of it. Are you dining here to-night?"

"Yes, with Smith."

"That's all right; so am I."

After which, not another word about poor St. Paul's.

Now, in Dunwich, if the parish church had happened to be burnt down, nothing else would have been talked about for weeks. And what was the conflagration

of any ecclesiastical edifice, in comparison with the catastrophe that had befallen the leading lady (if so stagey an expression may be pardoned) of the whole neighbourhood, the bride of the heir presumptive of the house of Dirleton; beautiful, accomplished—"best *amateur* lady rider in England, I am given to understand," says Mrs. Colville, naturally desirous not to confuse the future Lady Dirleton with any of your "horsebreakers"—who had, nevertheless, come to such fatal grief on the very first meet of the season. The meet had been at Dirleton Park itself. All the county had been asked to breakfast, and all Dunwich had gone to see it start afterwards for the chase. There were three hundred gentlemen in scarlet; a score of ladies in pony carriages, resolved to see the hounds throw off, but whom timidity or obesity forbade to mount a

horse : and about a dozen mounted beauties, neighbour nymphs in not altogether voluntary attendance upon Diana, the Hon. Mrs. Heyton. They had come, indeed, willingly enough, but by no means with the idea of playing second fiddle to their hostess—a mere nobody, whom Captain Heyton had "picked up," and (most inexplicably) married ; but circumstances had compelled them to take that subordinate part. Judith in her riding-habit was a spectacle calculated to exact worship from the mightiest hunter. If Nimrod had been there in person, he would have acknowledged her supremacy, and kissed her little buckskinned hand. She was an inch and a half taller than any of her compeers in her stock—I mean as she stood on the terrace with the rest, waiting for the horses to be brought round. When on horseback, she towered above

them some six inches, for she was mounted, by her own especial desire, upon Wall-topper—the self-same steed that had won the steeple-chase at Balcombe. Her cheeks did not need the glow that rushing through the air at headlong speed would presently bestow upon all faces; she looked the picture of health. And when the old Duke of Loamshire rode up to her side, perhaps to tell her so, but, at all events, to pay some old-world compliment, she had looked the picture of happiness.

Lord Dirleton had had so bad a night with his gout that he did not put in an appearance, even at the breakfast; and it was whispered by the envious of her sex (which I am afraid included the whole of them), that that unfortunate circumstance did not seem to have depressed Mrs. Heyton's spirits. Gout, it is said, carries

off everything else: but it also sometimes carries off its subject; and, if it did please heaven to take Lord Dirleton, then Judith would assume what she had of late been accustomed to look forward to as "her proper position." That she would become it, so far as personal appearance went—look every inch of it—there was no doubt. As for wits, she had in reality enough to serve for half a dozen viscountesses, but in that respect she always played many points under her game. Nobody knew how clever Judith was—except one person, who had paid very dearly for the information. Where she showed less judgment—and indeed her hand—was in manner. To her superiors, as the world considered them, she was oil; to her inferiors, she was vinegar. This should not, however, be laid to the sole charge of a base nature: years of unwilling subservi-

ence, of hated submission to a patron's caprices, had doubtless helped to make her what she was. The slave is always in training to assume the tyrant's place; and she had obtained it. Still, until she had come to Dirleton Park, this had not been so patent; nor was it only increase of opportunity that had brought it into prominence. Something had happened—or had not happened — since that period, which had put the Hon. Mrs. Heyton out. A certain person who was her bondsman —just as much her thrall as though he had worn her name engraved on an iron collar about his neck, as in the good old times—had dared to show signs of contumacy. He had not defied her, indeed, for he was a sane man enough; but when she had said, "Go," he had omitted to do so. And it was necessary for her comfort that he should go. She would not have about

her gates, liable to meet her in her walks or rides, with worn, reproachful face, one Evy Carthew, whom her husband, too, was fool enough to pity. This girl was ill, 'twas said: that might be so, or not; she was not ill enough to die it seemed. And being alive, and yonder—her humble roof within sight of her own chamber — the place which was "so royal, rich, and wide," and of which Judith was the mistress, was cursed and profitless. The very air that she drew in through her proud nostrils was poisoned for her; and the poison had worked within her veins, and frozen her young blood. That was what made her cruel, hard, impatient with all about her, and where she dared, she had shown herself to be so.

From this cause, although to the great so much is forgiven, so much excused, she had made many enemies. The very

servants of her household, used to the old lord's imperious ways, thought better of them, and prayed that his rule might last, and many a year elapse before the young master, whom they had liked so well, should come to reign over them, because of Judith who ruled *him*. That was understood by all—she was the captain's master. He was not henpecked, for John Heyton was no fool: where he *would* have his way, he got it: but it was grudged to him, and seldom got. Like the sluggard knight in the great master's story, he was averse to combat, indolent and easy-going, but once you roused his wrath, he snatched his lance, and with his visor up, rode reckless at his foe, and horse and man went down before him; and it was thought by those who knew him best, that his wrath was kindling now, and that his lady had need beware. Perhaps it was the

wish that was father to the thought; there had been no quarrel between them—not a word of remonstrance had been heard to pass her lips concerning her husband's visits to the doctor's house, nor the interest he manifested in his patient; but a coolness seemed to have grown up between them, and, at any rate, considering that they had been so lately married, the young couple were not fond.

With the village folk Judith was exceedingly unpopular. The captain, who had had the pick of all the young ladies in the land, might have chosen better, they thought. She was not to be named in the same breath as himself—except for beauty. Even the women among them did not refuse their admiration to her in this respect, and as they thronged to the Park and fringed the lawns and terrace, they pointed out the captain's lady to one

another, and acknowledged that he might well be proud of such a mate. Then when the horn sounded and the whip—for the dogs scenting forbidden game would fain have lingered in the Park—and all the gay company on horseback and on wheels moved slowly towards the gates, you could scarcely anywhere have seen a more goodly show. In the rearmost knot of all, with her husband by her side—somewhat silent and thoughtful, it was afterwards said, as though filled with some presentiment of woe (albeit the Past can trail a shadow as gloomy as any that the Future casts before it), rode Judith, superb of carriage, and flushed with pride and pleasure; only for a moment, as the cavalcade passed Seymour's Home, and with its noise and clatter brought the lieutenant himself into the little garden to lean on the low wall and watch it pass, did her laughing lips

close up, her face grow grave. Like a queen surrounded by her court, she had gone forth that morning, throned on that noble steed; and in the afternoon had been brought home in very different fashion; carried upon men's shoulders on a hurdle, since no other motion could her shattered frame endure. Her face was covered with her handkerchief, and hence some said that she had fallen face foremost; that her dainty features had been so cruelly disfigured that none could recognize them; others said that she had been pitched upon her head, and with such force that even if she made shift to cling to life, her mind was gone. The wildest rumours were afloat about her. Some even averred that she was dead already, and when at nightfall something on four wheels, drawn by four horses, whirled into the Park from town, it was whispered—so mad the people

were for monstrous news—that it was her coffin.

Dr. Burne might have sold his every syllable for gold, in answer to scores of eager questions, but gold could not procure even a sight of him. He had been sent for in hot haste to the Park, where two physicians from London had since joined him ; and all three remained there yet, though it was night. At nine o'clock however, it being quite dark, the doctor passed out unrecognized through the curious crowd that hung about the gates, and crossed the street to Seymour's Home.

" Is your young mistress still up, Jane ?" was his eager inquiry.

" Oh, yes, sir. It is impossible for any of us to go to bed without having heard a word—that can be relied on—of what has happened."

"I see, I see," answered the doctor, looking at the domestic very hard, but quite unconscious of her remark.

"Is your master with Miss Evy?"

"Yes, sir; they are both together; Miss Evy has sent me out a dozen times to learn how Miss Judith—that is, Mrs. Heyton—is progressing. If she had been her dearest friend, my poor young mistress could not have seemed more anxious. But that we naturally all are. How is she, sir? If it's a secret, doctor, nobody shall hear one word of it from me."

"Good girl. Yes, you can be trusted; now show me in."

"But you haven't told me, sir," persisted the abigail, frantic with curiosity and bent upon becoming the most sought-for personage in Dunwich as the confidante of the doctor, "How is she?"

"Mrs. Heyton? Hush — well, she is

*much the same*," was the disappointing reply, with which he pushed by her, and opened the parlour door.

At first, Mr. Hulet, who was sitting by the fire, and staring moodily into its glowing depths, did not so much as stir; but when Evy came forward to greet their visitor, he also rose in haste, and with a "God save us, is it you, doctor?" inquired his news.

"It is bad news," answered the doctor, slowly. "News, such as if it were of one dear to you, would wring your heart, and in any case should move it to pity."

"We do pity her," said Evy, softly.

"Will she live or die?" inquired the old man, with harsh abruptness. "That is the question."

"She will die—I knew you would be sorry when I told you that, old friend," he added, as Mr. Hulet groaned, and turned

away his face. "If you could but see her, you would forgive her, whatever she has cost your darling here. Others in your case, Evy, would say, 'It is a judgment;' but not you."

"What is it that has happened?" inquired she, looking nervously towards her uncle; "is it certain that she cannot live?"

"Nothing short of a miracle could prolong her life for eight and forty hours. The horse refused a fence, as I understand; she pressed him at it, and he reared and fell back upon her. The spine is crushed. She cannot rise, she cannot sit, it is pain to her even to draw breath. I have left her—lying on the spring couch that they have sent from town—a piteous spectacle. There is only one thing in the world that can give her any comfort, and I have promised to procure it."

"Great heaven, why do you waste time here then?" cried Evy, greatly moved by this picture of her once companion's piteous case.

"Because it is here alone that what she seeks is to be found. Evy, it was only this morning that I uttered bitter words to you concerning this unhappy woman, wished her ill-fortune, nay, God forgive me, lightly spoke of what is even now about to happen—her death. For my sake—if I may ask nothing for her own—enable me to make amends for it. Her one cry is to see Evy Carthew before she dies. I promised to bring you to her."

"She shall *not* go," cried Mr. Hulet, in harsh and grating tones. "I will not have her do it—Evy, I charge you, do not stir."

"Is that my old friend who speaks?" asked Dr. Burne, reprovingly. "His voice

is strange; his words are stranger still—I do not recognize himself in either."

"I tell you it is not decent, girl, to cross Captain Heyton's threshold," continued the old man, without taking notice of this remonstrance, "or if you have no shame upon your own account, forbear at least upon mine. Lord Dirleton has insulted me."

"For shame, sir," interrupted the doctor, with indignation; "what are these fine feelings worth that they should be quoted as obstacles to the comfort of a dying woman?"

"I did not speak to you, sir; I spoke to Evy," answered the old man, passionately. "I know you care nothing for my niece in comparison with your rich patient; but she is all in all to me. At this hour, and in this bitter weather, she would risk her life by venturing out of doors, just risen as she is from her sick bed."

"Your niece shall take no harm, Mr. Hulet, I promise you," answered the doctor, earnestly. "A closed carriage is in readiness, and will be here in five minutes, in case she follows the dictates of her own generous heart and consents to come."

"Indeed I must go, dear uncle," said Evy, soothingly. "I cannot refuse a request so solemn. Yes; send the carriage."

"To-morrow, go to-morrow," pleaded the old man.

But the doctor had already left the room.

"To-morrow may be too late, uncle; to-morrow I may have to reproach myself with what will haunt me to my own last hour."

"Go, then, and come back no longer my own darling, but a disobedient wilful girl, whom I have disowned. Do you hear me?"

His harsh notes failed him; and in appealing accents he added, "No, I don't mean that, Evy; I *can't* mean that; but you will have disowned your unhappy uncle. That woman will tell you such dreadful things about him, such unimaginable horrors, that you will shrink from him; we have heard, it is true, that she is delirious, but she will have method in her madness, ay, and malice too."

"My dear, dear uncle, be she mad or sane, what matters it? What power can words of hers have against the faith that I have painted to you but this morning?"

"But the proof! Suppose she shows the proof! Oh, pause while there is yet time; while yet you have an uncle whom you love and honour. I hear the carriage-wheels. Dear Evy, promise me!"

"I promise you, dear uncle, benefactor, father, to take all words for lies, all proofs

for forgeries, that seek to show you a guilty man—but I *must* go."

Here the doctor entered, with Jane laden with cloaks and shawls for her young mistress.

Mr. Hulet spoke no more, but sank down in his chair like one on whom Fate has spent its worst.

Evy stooped down and kissed his forehead, then hurried away, her trembling frame supported by the doctor's arm.

## CHAPTER X.

### JUDITH'S DEATH-BED.

"YOU will not leave me, doctor," whispered Evy, faintly, as, overcome by the tumult of her feelings as much as by the unwonted exertion, she lay back in the swift rolling carriage. "I shall have you by me all the time?"

"If you wish it, dear girl, it shall be so. You will see nobody, however, but Mrs. Heyton herself."

"Will he not be there, then?" she inquired.

The doctor had guessed rightly what was passing through his companion's mind—more terrible far than the interview before her had been the thought of meeting her former lover, her rival's husband.

"No, Evy, she will be quite alone."

"Does he know that I am coming, then?"

"Yes, since he knows *you*. 'She will come,' he said, when his wife entreated me to fetch you. I confess I had my doubts of my own powers of persuasion, though, if you could have seen her, if you could have heard her piteous prayers for you, a harder heart than yours, Evy, would have been melted. At first we thought her brain was affected; but that is not so. She is as clear in her mind as ever, though she is half dead already."

"Half dead, doctor! What do you mean?"

"The lower part of her body is paralyzed: but she can speak and write. Her first cry was for pen and ink: her next for you. I seem to hear it now, and yet I have heard sad sounds enough not to be lightly moved."

"Is not this the Hall, doctor?"

"Yes, but you are not to breathe the night air."

The carriage had stopped at the great gates; but they were now swung back to let it pass into the court-yard. The old porter, as its lamps shone on his purple face, looked wonder-stricken. He had little expected in the person for whom that unwonted order had been given, to behold Miss Carthew.

A levy of obsequious servants—lights—the spacious hall—and then, like one in a dream, she found herself being assisted up a vast staircase. The doctor was by her side,

and presently, in a broad, thick-carpeted corridor, hung with great pictures, he stopped and pressed her arm. Before them was a gilded door, with carved medallions, and over it a heavy entablature of oak, all fruit and flower.

"She is here," he whispered; and the door was opened softly, and a heavy velvet curtain drawn aside by unseen hands, and she stood in the sick woman's room. A spacious oak-panelled chamber, with silver sconces branching from the walls, and in the midst a bed, the curtain folds of which were gathered together in a crowned canopy, and fell tentwise; her eyes mechanically sought the pillow—but a voice she knew, tremulous, yet distinct, from the bed-foot said: "I am here, Evy," and, looking down, stretched out on a slight couch, as straight as any corpse laid out for burial, was Judith

Her face was seamed and pale, and pinched with pain, but her large eyes had kept their lustre, and they glowed upon her now with feverish yearning.

"It was good of you to come," she faltered; "I feared you would not, and there was so little time. In a day or two, at farthest, they tell me, I must die. To you that are alive and well, Death seems nothing terrible: but to *me?*——I cannot raise my head, nor look around me, Evy; are we alone?"

"We are quite alone, Judith. Dr. Burne came in with me, but he has left the room."

"Draw nearer, Evy, for since you have come, it seems that the evil spirits who watch round my pillow, waiting, waiting, until I die, draw back a little; and yet I have never earned their hate as I have yours. A few hours—two days at most—and I shall be at their mercy—as others

have been at mine, and I have not spared them. Two days, if so much, Evy, and then Death: the grave and worse—what lies beyond the grave. Think of it, think of it, and pity even *me*."

"I do pity you from my soul, Judith," answered Evy, "I am sorry beyond words can tell to see you thus."

"No, Evy, there is no one sorry—no one in all the world is sorry that I lie here a-dying, save myself. And when I am dead, to-morrow, or the next day, and have gone I know not whither, but I freeze with fear to think—there will not be one to mourn me."

Here Evy would have spoken, but Judith stopped her.

"You were about to say my husband would regret me. That was kind in you, for it would have cost you much. But he will not do so—not *now*—not *now*. You

look at me with pain on that account. It seems so hard to you, that I should lose his love, because I am lying thus, decrepit, and no longer fair: but let this comfort you, I never possessed it, Evy: it was given to *you*. Think, think of what I suffer, what I fear, to what low depths my pride has fallen—since I tell you this. You wonder, even if this be so, why he is not here; here by his dying wife; 'twere but a little thing, you think, that he should wait, though wearied of me, till I depart alone on the Dark Road, never to see him more, nor trouble him—and say good-bye; but do not blame him; 'twas I who bade him go; else, though he knows what I have sent for you to hear, he would have stayed, not out of love, but what you will not grudge me from him—merest pity."

The tears fell fast on Evy's burning

cheeks; she strove to speak—to defend herself from this unhappy woman, who took it for granted that she still loved the man who was no longer hers to love—but the words died away upon her tongue. In such a presence, with the Shadow of Death already on that motionless figure, and the fear of it stamped upon that disfigured face, she felt such protestations to be vain.

"Draw nearer, Evy, sit you down quite close," continued Judith, "lest through the weakness of my failing voice, you should miss aught of what I have to tell. Here is a paper—priceless to the man who has been your benefactor, and who for your sake was mine. Do not read it yet, but place it in your bosom for him, a gift which shall repay tenfold all the love he has lavished on you. Here is another, which I strove to write, in case I should not see

you, but which I could not finish. It is said by some that the guilt-laden soul is purged by earthly torments of its sinful burthen ; that something is abated of the punishment to come to those who have suffered here. If that be so, I am half ransomed, for every letter cost me a pang of torture, and was written as it were with my heart's blood. It is—or would have been, had I had strength to end it—what I must needs tell you now ; the Confession of a Lost Soul."

Such pain it evidently cost the wretched woman to draw her breath, that Evy besought her to be silent, or to confine herself to such points only as she might consider vital, and needful to be told ; but Judith shook her head—the very motion put her shattered frame to torture—and muttering, how that to tell the tale was itself a part of the punishment of which she

had spoken, and which it was good for her to suffer.

"I need not grope back through my loveless life for its beginning," she began, "nor paint the dull dark days of childhood, ere Mrs. Mercer took me an orphan from an orphan's home. She chose me, doubtless, as she would have chosen a dog or a bird, for my handsome looks; for I could have had no good character from the mistress, nor was I popular with my young companions. Selfish to the core, I thought to serve myself by serving no one else save those who could serve me: and even to those I grudged my service. So when you met me at Balcombe, you found me, as you would have found me at any other period of my life, devoted to my patroness while her eye was on me, honeying to such as Mrs. Bullion, who had benefits to bestow, and contemptuous of all others, who paid

back my scorn with a dislike that was not unwelcome to my gloomy pride. And yet I hated those who strove to please, and were successful, like yourself. I knew the comparisons that were made between us, always in your favour; and I felt most bitterly how you were held the heiress, I but the poor dependent. Nevertheless, I was compelled to use civility, because of Mrs. Mercer's growing fondness for you, and when I saw how she had resolved to wed your uncle, I resolved to make you my friend. Trading on the generous tenderness of your disposition, or, as it then appeared to me, using your dull wits to serve my private ends, for I thought myself so clever, when, alas! I was even a greater fool than knave—I persuaded you that I had a lover, whom poverty alone prevented from becoming my husband, and thereby enlisted your sympathies on my behalf. If

I had really loved, even *I* might perhaps have been touched by the simplicity with which you credited my words, and the unselfish aid you promised to afford me with Mr. Hulet ; but there was no more genuineness nor wholesome feeling in me, than in the imaginary Augustus whom I had created. Nay, even when your kindness had borne fruit, I felt no gratitude ; the sense of obligation hardened my envious heart against you rather, and the more so, since I found my new independence made me no more acceptable to others than before ; I could no longer say, ' It is because I am portionless that people flout me so, and flatter the well-dowered Evy.' As to your uncle, I had abhorred him from the first, for, from the first, I felt that he had seen through me, and I lived in fear of him, yet not so much in fear as hate, because I saw that he despised me ; I thanked

him for his benefits in my heart, no more than a dog thanks the careless hand that throws a bone to him, and I laid in wait, as conspirators who discover that they are watched and known to their predestined victim, lay in wait to kill and not to spare. Then presently—though not, as you imagined, for the first time from your own lips, for with all my cleverness I could not gain your confidence—I learnt of your great engagement. This was bitter news indeed. What I had looked for from the earliest time that I had begun to weave the net of my own life, was to win a wealthy husband. At first, my ideas had been comparatively humble; but when I saw, as I soon did, how beauty works with men, and felt my power, there were no bounds to my ambition. I might have married Mr. De Coucy if I would—it was a lucky miss for him—and I gave hopes to Mr. Paragon, which

would have blossomed, perhaps, but for the wrong I wrought yourself. These conquests were as nothing, however, when compared with such a success as yours. I listened with greedy ears to the stories of this young man's wealth and greatness, or rather to what they would have been, had he not sacrificed so much to keep your love. For this, I deemed him, as I deemed all others who consulted any interests but their own, to be a soft-hearted fool, yet envied you the chance that had made him yours. Then when I saw him, Evy—so handsome and bright, and full of courtesy—I will not soil Love's name, by saying that I fell in love with him, but I resolved to win him from you, if I could. You start, you gather up your skirts, as though in neighbourhood to some vile creeping thing —and so you are: I was the adder, Evy, that you nourished in your bosom, and

who turned and bit you. And here it lies at last—oh! pity it—trampled and torn, and without power to writhe, far less to bite, till some one comes to cast it into flame."

"Oh, Judith, Judith, I forgive you," cried Evy, pitifully; "forbear to torture yourself by further self-revilings. You are penitent; and since what is done cannot be undone——"

"Ay, but it can, girl," interrupted Judith, earnestly; "a little, just a little. That is the one plank upon the awful unknown sea before me, to which I cling. If I held my peace, I should perpetuate a grievous wrong—an infamy. To have left one of those two papers behind me, and not to have written the other, would have been your uncle's doom. These, and this full confession I am about to make, are my poor claims to mercy—so I pray you hear

me out. I will not linger over the treacherous acts by which I strove to make you of less account in Captain Heyton's eyes, or to exalt myself in them : enough to say that they were vain. He loved you with a faithful heart, Evy, and though I did my best to draw him to myself, and tempted him with every wile I knew, he still was yours. I felt that I was beaten, foiled, yet so far from submitting to defeat, when it seemed most certain, my desire for success had grown to be a consuming passion, the flame of which it took all my care and cunning to conceal. Then something happened, Evy, which your keenest conjecture has never guessed—to put those I hated most beneath my feet, and to give him whom I most desired to my arms."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CONFESSION.

"YOU doubtless well remember, Evy, the events of that day at the cottage, on the night of which Mrs. Hulet disappeared. Mr. De Coucy called, and your aunt expressed herself in such terms about your uncle's ancestor as angered her husband exceedingly. Her words, which were designedly irritating and contemptuous, rankled in his mind, and all that evening, notwithstanding that we girls were present, their quarrel continued. It was something far worse

than their ordinary bickering, and it became so painful to you, that you left the drawing-room before the usual time, and retired to your own chamber. Mr. Hulet presently followed your example, and then your aunt, who was very nervous and excited, proposed a turn upon the cliff walk, to which, as in duty bound, I assented. Curiously enough, no sooner were we alone together, than she acknowledged herself to be in the wrong; confessed that she had vexed your uncle designedly, and without provocation, and, but for my advice, would, I verily believe, have gone upstairs and asked his pardon. I hated Mr. Hulet far too much, however, not to combat this proposal with every argument at my command, and, in the end, she resolved to put off reconciliation with him till the morning —that morning which she was fated never to behold. She was very nervous and

hysterical—scarcely mistress of herself, in fact—and I had some difficulty to get her to her own room. By that time it was late, yet I felt no inclination for sleep. The thought of your approaching marriage was ever present with me, and the sense of my own powerlessness to prevent it made me chafe and rage like a caged tiger. Perhaps, also, the scene of which I had just been witness excited me, and made me disinclined for repose. At all events, I left my room and went downstairs again; it was a starlit night, and I thought to cool my feverish frame by pacing up and down the garden. I had no candle, but there was light enough in the drawing-room to find one's way about it: the shutters as usual were not closed, and I had but to open the glass door to gain the lawn; I did so, and had hardly closed it behind me, when I heard a noise within

the house. Some one was coming softly down the stairs. It was Mrs. Hulet, still in her evening dress, and with a candle in her hand; she came into the drawing-room, with nervous haste, and began to search for something on the table, bending her head close down over it, as near-sighted people are wont to do. From my place outside the window, I could see what was on the table far better than she did, and I saw what I concluded she had come to seek for, her bottle of drops. She never went to bed without it, but in her distress and excitement that evening, she had doubtless forgotten to take it with her. There was also another bottle upon the table, which I recognized as one of Mr. Hulet's most powerful medicines — the very one which he had been remonstrated with for leaving about the house on a previous occasion—I knew it to be prussic acid."

"Poor soul," cried Evy, "then it was an accident after all—but then, how could she have fallen into the sea?"

"Ay, how indeed? You are far from the truth yet, Evy. It was no accident: it was murder—and it was I who did it!"

"You! oh, Judith!" Evy shuddered in spite of her efforts to conceal her horror, and hid her face.

"Yes, I; for I could have saved her life, and I did not. I saw her take up the prussic acid by mistake, and then with trembling hands uncork the bottle. There was plenty of time for me to have tapped at the window, and given her warning of what she was about to do; but I never stirred a finger. Three wicked thoughts rushed into my mind together, and held possession of it. One was that this woman had provided for me in her will. I had

independent means already; I had not even the meagre excuse of poverty for what I did: it was mere greed that actuated me. 'If this woman dies,' whispered the devil in my ear, 'you will be rich.' My second thought was, 'Her death will be a thorn in her husband's side to his life's end. He will feel that it is through his self-willed obstinacy and persistence in leaving drugs about, of which he has been warned so often, that she has come by her end. That look of supercilious scorn with which he had regarded me, as though it were not worth while to expose the evil which he had detected, would be exchanged for a shameful abasement; he would never lift up his proud head again.' My third thought, the most importunate of the three, was this: 'If Mrs. Hulet dies, Evy's marriage will have to be put off.'

That of itself would be welcome, and moreover there would be time given me to plot and plan; the cup of happiness would not be then so close to your lips, and I might yet find some opportunity to dash it from them. All this occurred to me in a few seconds, during which I beheld my patroness—the woman I was indebted to for so much, however ungraciously bestowed, and whose very bounty was then tempting me—standing as it were on the brink of the grave—where I am standing now, Evy. Oh, if men could know, as *I* know, what it is to die, to feel the foot slip on the verge of that dread precipice in which existence ends, and the hands clutching in vain to find a hold, and the voice that would fain cry, 'Help! Help!' choked with the last sands of life, or desperately dumb because we feel no help can avail; when the eyes

that dare not turn to heaven are fixed on the dark void beneath. Oh, if men could know it, Evy, there would surely be no more murders. The most merciless would spare his worst enemy his life—his life—yet *I* did not spare *hers*. I saw her pour those drops, each one of which would have been enough to kill her, into the medicine glass, and then—there would have been time even then to save her, but I had lost the power; my senses were numbed with horror; my face was glued to the glass as though fascinated by the tremendous spectacle; I saw her drink, then turn and look towards me. Perhaps she saw me, and was terrified at the sight, as well she might be; or, perhaps, the poison was already at work: but over her face there stole a look of unspeakable awe and terror, and then she fell forward—dead, upon the floor. That was how Mrs. Hulet came by her end, Evy."

"How horrible! And you to have been the witness of it, Judith."

"Ay, and the *willing* witness. The one who could have saved her life by stirring a finger, by breathing a word, and yet who neither moved nor spoke. But that was not the sum of my crimes. It was but the commencement of them. Listen. For an instant after your aunt had fallen I forgot all my wicked hopes, and threw open the door with the intention of assisting her, notwithstanding that my reason told me that she must be past all aid. But just as I did so, I heard your uncle, whose chamber was above the drawing-room, and whom the noise occasioned by Mrs. Hulet's fall had doubtless alarmed, hurriedly leave his room, and come down stairs. Then I fled back to the lawn, and took my place among the laurels, whence, myself unseen, I could

still watch all that went on in the apartment. My own position had now become somewhat perilous, in case my absence from my room should be discovered, but I did not think of that; nor even of the catastrophe of which I had just been the witness; I was seized with an overwhelming curiosity to know what your uncle would do. He ran in from the hall in haste, but without noise—for he had come down in his stockinged feet—and his face was pale and frightened. It was my conviction that he had already guessed what had really happened. He knelt down by your aunt's side, and propped her up as well as he could against the sofa; then searched the table with haggard eyes until they lit upon the bottle of prussic acid, which he hastily thrust into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Then he looked round him, with a nervous and excited air, and seemed to listen intently.

"I had made up my mind that he would at once rouse the house, and was in that case prepared to run in, and account for my being out of doors by saying that I had been on the cliff walk seeking to cure a headache, but this was evidently not his intention. When he found no one stirring he came to the glass door and softly opened it. I was not ten paces off, and could observe him with great minuteness. There was terror in his face, but also an obstinate resolution, for which I could not account. Once more he listened and gazed around him, but all was quiet; though I thought he could not have failed to hear my heart-beats. Then he went back, and lifting your aunt's body—to which his utmost strength seemed hardly equal—he staggered with it through the door, then dragged it after him across the lawn towards the cliff walk."

"Oh heaven! the shock had turned his brain then!" cried Evy, clasping her hands.

"Not so," said Judith. "It was, indeed, but a mad scheme; but he was sane enough. I saw his plan at once, and guessed the motives that were actuating him. Filled with shame and horror at what had happened, and conscious that his own wilful carelessness and perversity had brought about his wife's death, his first idea—the rash instinct of a man at once obstinate and weak—was to conceal his own share in the catastrophe. Sensitive as he was to public opinion, the idea doubtless struck him that since Mrs. Hulet and himself were known to be on ill terms, it might be suggested that he had left the poison about with the express intention of getting rid of her, whereas, if the body were found in the sea, she would be supposed to have fallen into it by accident from the cliff walk—a

victim to the rashness of which she, on her part, had been warned. The one event, in fact suggested the other. This, at all events, was the current of thought that I ascribed to him, and as I did so, an indescribable joy took possession of my soul; for would not this very desire for averting the suspicion of others put this man at my mercy? I looked on with secret exultation at a scene that would have wrung your heart to witness, Evy. Imagine the task that your uncle's pride and misdirected resolution had set his fastidious hands to do—to cast the body of her he had once tenderly loved, and whose death he regretted above all things, over the very path that had been her favourite haunt, into the pitiless sea. Nothing but the frantic haste in which his purpose was conceived and carried out would probably have permitted of its execution. It was high tide, and the

beating of the waves against the rocks beneath alone broke the silence of the night. Without noise, but with intense and persistent effort, he dragged the lifeless body to the cliff walk, and lifted it on to the low wall. Then for the first time he paused, and leant down over his terrible burthen with a look of yearning tenderness and distress. I thought at first that he had a doubt of her being dead, though I had none, for I had seen how large a draught of the deadly drug she had taken, and how she fell like a lopped tree, without an effort to save herself, but it was not that; he had stooped to kiss the cold white face, the recollection of which, perhaps, as it had been when she was young and comely, smote him sore—and then with averted eyes he pushed her from him—over the cliff wall into the sea. He must have heard the splash in the wave below,

for even I could do so from my place of espial; but he cast no glance behind him to make sure; but ran indoors like one pursued. And though he knew it not then, he *was* pursued, by one cruel as Fate, relentless as the Grave, who had him in her clutch, a powerless victim, from that hour.

"Though death had been so late before my eyes, I thought not of it; there was no gloom for me; my heart beat high with triumph: I saw my way to fortune, and above all, Evy, I saw that the way at last was clear before me to win the man you loved, the man that I desired. I had power to make you poor, and if that failed —if his foolish passion for you was too fierce for poverty to cool—I had power to disgrace you. I had no plan as yet—for that I was contented to be guided by circumstances—but from that moment I

felt that I had my foot upon your uncle's neck, and that where he bent you must needs bend too. Not till long after the light was extinguished in Mr. Hulet's room did I venture within doors, for well I knew that he must be lying awake, listening with feverish intentness for every sound. As for me, I also lay awake, maturing my scheme, or picturing the success that was to attend it. In the morning while we three sat at breakfast, I never took my eyes off Mr. Hulet: I think, even if I had not been witness of what he had done, I should have suspected from his manner that there was something wrong with him: the careless air with which he asked us if we had heard any one stirring in the night, contrasting so ill with his anxiety for our reply: the denial so unnecessarily positive of his having left his room which you said you fancied you had heard him do: the

agony of expectation with which he waited for the news of his wife's disappearance, and the pains it cost him to appear indifferent when it came, and to account for it in an ordinary way: all these things I marked as a careful surgeon watches the symptoms of his patient; I saw that he was nervous, unhinged, repentant to the last degree of what he had done, and would have fallen an easy prey to me even then, had I chosen to make my terms with him. But I waited for the more opportune time that I saw coming.

"In the meanwhile I sowed suspicion of him everywhere, not indeed hinting that he had made away with his unhappy wife —for that was not my purpose, at least at present—but suggesting that she had been driven by his ill conduct to put an end to her own existence. You remember, Evy, how I spoke of that, and how indignant

you were that I should have done so, and especially in the presence of the servant: it was an important part of my plan to set evil reports of your uncle floating among the vulgar, that they might be dispersed abroad, and prejudice the coroner's jury, which I took it for granted would be summoned. All this time, however, the body remained undiscovered, and my apprehensions began to be excited lest it should never be found, in which case there would of course be no inquest, and my testimony would be valueless except so far as I could work with it on Mr. Hulet's fears. I could see, too, that he rallied a little, in this very expectation; if the corpse had been taken out to sea, even though the supposition he sought to foster—namely, that she had fallen by accident from the cliff walk—might not be so strong as if she had been found drowned, yet on the other hand

there would be no further investigation and inquiry, but only baseless surmise. When at last the body was discovered, what he feared above all things was the inquest, and it was for that crisis that I reserved my knowledge of his fatal secret. He had already a vague sense, I think, of my wielding some unwonted power, beyond that which attached to my having become by his wife's death possessed of means: and this perhaps was sufficient to prevent him demanding an explanation of my conduct towards him, which was designedly disrespectful and even hostile. I am quite certain it was a relief to him, when I announced myself on the morning of the inquest as indisposed, and declined to attend it as a witness. I felt pretty sure, however, that I should be compelled to do so, and under any circumstances that was the time at which I had made up my mind to strike my long meditated blow.

"My great object was to make your uncle commit himself by a false representation of the actual facts, or by a concealment of them, before my own turn came to give evidence; and into this trap he necessarily fell. The jury having heard what he had to say—and probably believing it—still, naturally enough, desired the testimony of one so familiar with the deceased lady's habits as myself, and who, moreover, had been the last to see her alive. They sent for me, and I returned them word that Mr. Hulet must come for me in person, or I would not budge. In their eyes that may probably have seemed an impertinent affectation, but in your uncle's I well knew that it would have a more serious significance. He came to the cottage from the inn in fear of he knew not what: and what he was when he had learnt the worst, you saw with your own eyes that evening."

"I remember it well," said Evy, thoughtfully; "we had all noticed how much better he had borne the events of that sad day than we had expected: how relieved he seemed to be when his own part in it was done; and yet when I returned home, so wretched and despairing were his looks that I feared his heart was breaking."

"He had miseries enough to break it, Evy, though he dared not speak of them, and it was I who piled them on him one by one, as those who 'pressed' the wretched prisoners of old, seeking to extort confession, placed on their labouring breasts, stone after stone, till at last nature succumbed, and they told all. My own breath comes like theirs; I must rest awhile: and in the meantime read the paper that I gave you: the confession wrung by torture from your unhappy uncle."

Evy opened the smaller of the two docu-

ments which Judith had given her, and read what follows, written with trembling and as if remonstrant fingers, but manifestly in Mr. Hulet's handwriting.

"*I confess that on the night of April* 28*th*, 18—, *I threw the body of Sophia Hulet, my wife, over the cliff walk of my house at Balcombe, into the sea.*

"*Angelo Hulet, May* 5*th.*"

## CHAPTER XII.

THE CONFESSION—(*continued*).

"HOW did you ever persuade my unhappy uncle to place such a damning piece of evidence as this written paper in your hands?" inquired Evy, regarding the document with horror, as though itself had had some venomous life. "His error was great enough, heaven knows, but it did not include the heinous guilt which this imputes. The words are true enough, but the meaning they suggest goes far beyond them."

"So pleaded he," answered Judith;

"but I—the unjust judge, who held his fate in my hard hands—pretended to discredit him. I affected to believe him guilty of murder. 'I saw you throw your wife into the sea,' said I, 'and I believe you killed her first. You tell me she took poison by mistake; if that be so, let her body be examined, and science prove her to have been poisoned: then let the law prove who poisoned her.' His cheek grew pale at that: he had already lied about her in the face of the law: and the new story that he would have to tell was inherently most improbable. It would have been difficult indeed to persuade any one unconscious of his peculiar idiosyncrasies, that to conceal the consequences of what was after all but a fatal imprudence, he should have taken measures such as seemed so disproportionate to the risk. If he could not persuade me who knew him—and I

took care he should not—how could he hope to persuade others? I did not affect to be greatly shocked or horrified with him on account of the crime itself. I had always disliked him, as I now frankly told him, and was not surprised that his passions had brought him to this pass: I did not even conceal from him that his position caused me satisfaction. It would be both my duty and my pleasure, I said, to go at once before the coroner, and tell the plain unvarnished fact, as I had seen it.

"'Suppose you do, and I deny it,' replied he, rising for once to something like defiance; 'is not my word as good as yours? Cannot I prove by Evy's evidence that you have always hated me, and show this story to be a trumped-up malicious tale?'

"'There is the presence of the prussic acid,' said I, quietly; 'which you seem to

have forgotten.' If that could have lasted for ever, there would have been no need to demand his written confession: I had only to threaten to denounce him, and cause the body to be exhumed: but as it was, that paper was essential to my purpose.

"'What is it you demand?' groaned he, despairingly, when he found himself in my vice, 'name your own terms; I dare not defy you, since that would be to brand with infamy my innocent niece.'

"That reference to you, Evy, closed my heart against your wretched uncle more than aught else; for your ruin was the object I had in view, even more than his own.

"'I must have your written confession,' answered I, 'in terms that I have fixed upon, and shall dictate; I demand from you the thirty thousand pounds or so, of

which I know you to be possessed; and you must promise to prevent Evy's marriage with Captain Heyton.'

"To the first point, though it was in fact the principal one, since it in a measure comprised the others, he did not make much opposition: the mere reference to the fact of my having been a witness to that awful deed, on which he had imagined only the stars of heaven to have looked down, seemed to unnerve him, and subdue him to my views. Nor, be it remembered, had he much time to argue with me, since the coroner was waiting for my evidence at that very moment. To the second point he objected that to take so immense a sum would be to strip him of his all; but I was merciless, not so much through greed—although I was always grasping, as you know—as to make sure that you would be dowerless. Since I was to conceal all

suspicion of his guilt during my approaching ordeal, I could not of course bring shame upon you through your uncle; so I could only make you poor; but that at least should be done effectually. As for my third point, it was not carried. Your uncle positively refused to use his influence to break off the match between yourself and Captain Heyton. 'Do your worst, Judith,' said he; 'I have destroyed my own happiness for life, but hers I will not destroy.' 'Yet if we split on this,' reasoned I, and I go into the witness-box yonder to tell the truth, do you think Captain Heyton will hold to his engagement with the niece of a man who will be hung?'

"'No matter,' returned he, trembling in every limb, nevertheless; 'I will have no part in persuading her to give him up. I will be neither for nor against, if that suffices you; but move a finger against my darling's happiness I will not.'

"With this I was fain to be content, and the more so, since I had myself a plan to hinder your marriage which I thought would render Mr. Hulet's aid unnecessary. When I left him, my hard terms having been acceded to, and repaired to the inn to give my evidence, do you not remember, Evy, how you besought me to spare your uncle all I could? That gave me the very opportunity for which I looked. Without compromising him in any public way, I let you know that I had it in my power to bring shame upon him, which for your sake only, I forbore to do—albeit I had sold my privilege of speech by that time at a very high price. On a subsequent occasion I took care to remind you of this sacrifice of my finer feelings of duty, whereby I not only laid you under an obligation, but made you reflect upon the impropriety of proceeding with your engagement. You

might have suffered Captain Heyton to take you as a dowerless bride, but scarcely as one whose guardian and only relative lay under a cloud of suspicion, dark and even menacing, though it lacked tangible shape. All happened, alas! as I would have had it. The arguments I used to you, advising your immediate marriage with Captain Heyton before he should come to hear evil reports of your uncle, and of your own pecuniary ruin, were intended, of course, to produce precisely opposite effect; to arouse your sense of honour and self-respect. But they were quite superfluous; you were too generous, too delicate to permit your lover to become a poor man for your sake, far less to risk the taint of shame. When he told me with his own lips that you had refused him on your uncle's account, who was selfishly disinclined to see you married, I perceived

your pious fraud, though he did not, and I helped it on. You could never in truth have loved him, I argued, since you preferred another's interests—another's companionship—to his own. It might be confessed that you showed a certain indifference to wealth, but that arose less from nobility of character than from contracted views of life; you were just one of those who would stick to some dull uninteresting relative, simply because he was connected with you by blood, and yet be incapable of a great passion. Captain Heyton must pardon me, but I had always thought you unworthy of him, and had even ventured, though unsuccessfully, to hint as much. It was fortunate, in my opinion, that you had opened his eyes with your own hand in time. All this I said, and much more, but a few minutes after your rejection of him in the garden at Cliff Cottage, and

before he had recovered from the mortification of his rejected suit. I could see he was piqued and irritated to an extreme degree, though I affected not to do so. I was well aware that his heart's affections were with yourself, in spite of all my machinations, and that if I won him, it would be owing to his disappointment at your conduct rather than any merit that he saw in me. At the same time I had one advocate in my favour, my beauty, never more powerful with a man (notwithstanding what they may tell you of their loving once and once only) than when he has just lost possession of some other object of admiration. Do not blame him, therefore, but rather despise me, Evy, who left no art untried to make him seek solace for your seeming inconstancy in my pretended devotion. To you—perhaps to any woman—such sudden transference of vows seems

incredible, but it is my belief that not a man on earth under similar conditions could have withstood me. He had, doubtless often admired me before, though his fidelity to you had forbidden him to think of me, except as your friend and companion; I was not a stranger to him, and I easily persuaded him that I had always felt for him that love which circumstances had hitherto forbidden me to breathe. At all events he rode forth from Cliff Cottage, as he had come, an accepted suitor; it was only his betrothed that had suffered change. Deprived of my presence, indeed, he might soon enough have repented of a vow, uttered as much in frenzy as in passion; but I made up my mind not to leave him long. He was going to town, he said, and Mrs. Bullion, who, since I had grown rich, had become very gracious to me, lived in town, and would, I knew, receive me, and

give me opportunities of meeting him. Then, when I had conquered so far, I could afford to pity you a little; I felt some compunctions even for the treachery and ingratitude of which I had been guilty towards you; when you wished me happiness with my Augustus—so little guessing who that Augustus was—I scarcely dared to look up in that face, so full of innocent simplicity, for very shame. Your good-bye had such terrors for me that I fled from it.

"But shame does not last long with such as I. I had work enough to occupy my thoughts, and to put you and your wrongs out of my mind. Moreover, it was useless to think of them, since reparation could not now be made. I wanted the whole fortune I had extorted from Mr. Hulet to recommend myself, if not to my husband, at least to his uncle, Lord Dirleton.

This new engagement of his nephew would be almost as displeasing to him as the old one had been. I was no mate in any sense for his heir and favourite nephew; and he said so. But, on the other hand, he never positively forbade our marriage. His word was not passed, as it had been in your case, mainly on account of that ancestor of Mr. Hulet's, that he would never consent to such a union. I believe that, notwithstanding its ineligibility, he was so far pleased with the match since it gave him an opportunity of making matters up with Captain Heyton, to whom he is genuinely attached. But I did not feel that I was in a position to throw away a chance of propitiating him—to give back any portion of the money I had wrung from your uncle, and which, with my own fortune, made me no insignificant heiress. And very soon the very idea of restitution died away. I

have not been happy in my marriage, Evy; you may well suppose, though I never thought of that—that Heaven refused to bless a union brought about by treachery and extortion. From the very first I failed to win my husband's love. We married; for I was resolved there should be no dangerous delays while matters were yet in doubt as to whether we should obtain Lord Dirleton's forgiveness, and it angered me to note how much he thought of that, even in those early days when he should have been devoted to me, and indifferent to such considerations. If he had married Evy Carthew, thought I, with bitterness, he would not have cared for house nor land. That hardened my heart against you more than ever.

"We had made our preparations to go abroad for a time, despairing of a reconciliation with the old lord at present, when he

suddenly relented. Nay more; gouty as he was, he contrived to pen an affectionate letter to my husband, bidding him bring his wife to Dirleton Park. 'In a word,' said he, 'come home.'

"That was a proud day for me, Evy. It is not true that the wicked are never happy. The dream of my life was at last realized. I was about to assume a great position—a greater one than my wildest aspirations had ever reached. When this old lord should die—and I was already speculating on that—I should be the lady patroness of a county. My husband was pleased because he had regained his inheritance. I tried to believe that he was pleased with the idea of presenting his beautiful bride to those at home.

"Then, suddenly, I remembered that I had learnt, from a certain private source, that your uncle had removed with you to

Dunwich, and was living there. When I had once got possession of his written confession—after which he became, as it were, my bond-slave—I imposed certain conditions upon him. One was, that he was never to reveal, even on his death-bed, the part that I had played with him. Of course, I could not ensure this; but, as long as he lived, at all events, I knew he would be silent for his own sake. Another stipulation was, that he should not dwell within a certain number of miles of my own residence. When he had gone to Dunwich I had certainly had no expectation of going to Dirleton Park. I thought Captain Heyton would have made, at least, no better conditions with his uncle than had been agreed to in your own case; but since Fortune had thus declared in our favour, it was not likely that I should brook the unwelcome presence of my victim and your

self. It would, on many accounts, have been highly undesirable that you should continue to live in such close proximity to me; and, under any circumstances, I should have insisted on your uncle leaving the neighbourhood. As it was, I had only to remind him of our agreement—I always called it 'our agreement,' though his wishes had been so little consulted in it—and to bid him depart. If he wanted money, I offered to supply him with a little—of his own. I was resolved, as I said, that you should go at once; but the idea of your presence did not disturb me so much as you may suppose. I was immersed in my visions of greatness, and thought but little of such insignificant persons as yourselves. Then something happened which caused me, perforce, to pay more attention to you.

"'Judith,' said my husband, one morn-

ing—it was just after he had received some letter from the steward at the Park, for he had already begun to transact business for his uncle, as he had been accustomed to do of old—'are you aware that Mr. Hulet and—and his niece are living at Dunwich ?'

"'Yes,' said I, 'I know it. What then ?'

"For I was curious to hear what he would say ; I had grown very bold with him—so bold, perhaps, as sooner or later to have ensured a quarrel between us.

"'What is that to us ?'

"'To you,' said he, 'perhaps very little : though I should have thought you would have felt some embarrassment in meeting Mr. Hulet.'

"Believing that my great fortune had all come to me (as indeed it had, though in such illegitimate fashion) from your uncle,

or his deceased wife, he had pressed me to offer to restore at least a portion of it to him: and this indeed I had done, but Mr. Hulet (who had my instructions to that effect beforehand) had declined it.

"'Well, at all events, Judith,' he continued, since I did not speak, 'it would be very embarrassing to ME. I had no idea, until I heard it this morning in a letter from De Coucy, that Mr. Hulet was at Seymour's Home — good heavens, how poor they must be! It is frightful——'

"'I have heard it is a very comfortable place,' said I.

"'Comfortable!' echoed he, with indignation. 'I believe you would think the workhouse comfortable enough for your benefactor and Evy Carthew.'

"'I am glad you have mentioned the young lady's name at last,' returned I: 'because I know that it is she who has

been in your mind, and not 'my benefactor,' as you choose to term him, all along. Nothing, of course, can be comfortable enough for *her* in your eyes; while the tender 'embarrassment' of meeting her, I can easily imagine, would in your case be very great.'

"'Do not let me have to tell you what I am thinking of you just now, Judith,' answered my husband, sternly. 'But be assured of this, that since Mr. Hulet and his niece do happen to be living at Dunwich, that I shall *not* live there. I shall write to my uncle to-day to postpone our visit.'

"'Are you mad?' cried I. (I was almost mad myself to think that for a puling piece of sentiment, this man should thus put in peril our whole future fortunes.) 'Would you reject the hand your uncle holds out to us, to save yourself a passing pang? How

like a man that is! Your informant, however, has not been quite accurate in his intelligence. It is true that Mr. Hulet and his niece have been living at Dunwich, but they are now, as it happens, on the point of departing from it to some more eligible place of residence.'

"'How do you know that?' inquired my husband, sharply.

"Simple as he was, and prepared at all points as I had endeavoured to be, for all inquiries concerning you both, this question took me aback. I knew that you were going, because I had written peremptorily to your uncle to urge his immediate departure, and it was out of the question that he should prove rebellious. I replied, however, that I had heard from Mrs. Hodlin Barmby to that effect.

"My husband seemed only half satisfied; and you may imagine my rage and chagrin

when I got Mr. Hulet's letter, stating that you were too ill to be removed. I did not believe it; I thought it a device of your own, to remain in Dunwich, to show you were not afraid of me, or even perhaps in hopes to make me tremble; but if I had believed it, I should have been scarcely less enraged. I made up my mind to give that screw a turn, which I had only to turn *enough* to crush your unhappy uncle. No sooner did I arrive here than I set evil tales afloat about his treatment of his late wife, and even hinted that there had been a difference of opinion among the jury as to whether the verdict should not have been an open one. It was my object to make him as unpopular as possible, and also to let you learn the cause; for I knew that, having learnt it, you would be the first to withdraw him from the reach of malicious tongues. It was a devilish deed

to do, with you lying on what might have been your death-bed, and considerations of mere prudence would scarcely have urged me to it; but I was pushed on by jealousy. It was wormwood to me to learn that every day my husband called at Dr. Burne's to ask about you. It was not your fault, and yet it was with you and not with him that I was most enraged. It chafed me so to think, though I had grown so great, and you had shrunk so small, that you had still such power; I could not prevent my husband showing interest in you; something warned me that it would be even dangerous to tax him with it: and that thought chafed me too. I felt that though I had risen so high, you were still an obstacle in my path of pride, a drop of bitterness in my cup of joy; and at all hazards, even at the risk of driving your uncle to desperation, I was resolved

that you should go. As for him, poor wretch, I had no pity for him. Since you had done me naught but kindness, and always credited me with good intentions, whereas Mr. Hulet had committed the inexpiable offence of having known me from the first for what I was, my cruelty towards him may seem less inexplicable than it was in your case; but I was swayed by no such considerations. Looking on my own motives now without any shadow of excuse or subterfuge—for I am past all that; all is as plain within my gloomy soul as though some lurid flame borrowed from hell itself was shining within it; my conviction, I say, is that as some cruel tyrant who has wrung his slave with torture, is urged on, by the very spectacle of his savage work, to further torments, so I, who had wronged you both, robbed you of happiness and him of home, was urged by

the very knowledge of your ruin, to heap blow on blow, and hurt on hurt upon you. There is something in a good book, somewhere, about making ourselves meet for the companionship of those we are to mingle with after death. And that was my case, Evy. There is no need for change of place, except to punish me: I am a devil already."

"Oh Judith, Judith," cried Evy, piteously, "you know not what you say. Forbear to vex yourself with such terrible imaginings; you have made your peace with me—with both of us—for I can answer for my uncle—strive then to make it with heaven. You must be wearied out with this long talk, which I would never have permitted, unless I had thought it would have given you ease. Try and sleep a little, and then you will have strength to pray."

"Pray! Sleep! Evy, you might as well bid me rise and walk!"

"There was One on earth, Judith, who could bid sick men do so. He has not lost His power, now, but lives in heaven to use it for such as you. For those upon whom Justice frowns He speaks in Mercy."

"There was a prayer, I learnt long ago—at the Orphanage, Evy: a little girl there—a fool, I thought her for it—told me once that it seemed to comfort her; that when she had said it, she felt somehow as though she were not an orphan; that she had a Father in heaven."

"Was it the Lord's Prayer, Judith?"

"Perhaps. How dark the room grows. Are the candles burning dim, Evy?"

"No, dear. It is because you are growing weak; that is," added she, hastily, for the scared, hopeless look, that for a little while had left her companion's face, once

more took possession of it as she spoke; "this exertion has been too much for you. You must take a little sleep, indeed you must."

"I have no time to sleep. Did not the doctors say, 'two days at farthest,' and much of that—of what to me who lie in agony, is dear and precious life—is already gone. Would you have me waste it? But you need sleep, I see. Go, Evy, go, and if I live, come back to-morrow, for you are all in all to me. Nay, don't deny me. If you knew how strange and sweet it seems to ask you to depart for your own sake; to leave me, though I yearn to keep you here; it is my first self-sacrifice, dear Evy; my very first—Oh that this were but the beginning of life and not its close—I pray you accept it."

Evy arose, and pale and trembling stood beside the couch of her dying rival; her-

self just risen from a sick bed, she was indeed ill fitted to attend one; but she had no thought of that.

"I will come to-morrow, dear Judith," whispered she, stooping down to kiss her.

"Coals of fire, coals of fire," murmured the wretched woman, and then closed her eyes. They were words that rang in Evy's ears for many a day.

At the door she found the nurse in waiting, and Dr. Burne below, who accompanied her in the carriage as before.

"You look sadly troubled, dear Evy," said he; "I fear your uncle will blame me much for having caused you such an ordeal."

"No, doctor, he will bless you rather," answered Evy, gravely. "May I ask even at this hour, that you will go to Mr. Mellish and beseech him to visit Mrs. Heyton. She will not sleep, although she

feigned to be about to do so, for my sake."

"She must be greatly changed," was the naïve reply.

"She is," answered Evy, gravely. "The change also from life to death is drawing near with her. You will do what I ask, if not for her sake, for mine?"

The doctor readily gave his promise, and duly performed it.

At Seymour's Home Evy found her uncle had retired to his own room. This did not surprise her, for she could easily imagine that he desired no witness to their first interview. He was up and dressed, pacing his chamber in impatience for her coming, and had been doing so for hours.

"My dear, dear uncle," cried she, running towards him.

"Then the woman has not told you," exclaimed he, holding her at arm's length, and scanning her face with anxious eager-

ness; "she has spared me something. She must be on her death-bed then, indeed."

"Oh, uncle, don't say that; she is penitent and beseeches your forgiveness."

"If she has not told you, she shall have it. If she has still left me my darling—to love and comfort me—I will forgive her all."

"She has, uncle, she has; and yet she has told me all. I know the fatal error which you committed in such a moment of remorse and agony that you scarce knew what you did. I have the proof of it, here, in your own handwriting; but it was not a crime, uncle; I always said it was not a crime." She pressed the paper into his hand, which he opened eagerly, and then thrust into the fire.

"Free, free at last," he cried, "and yet not outlawed from my darling's heart; it is too much of happiness."

"Not more than you deserve, dear uncle," answered Evy, embracing him; "after the wretchedness which five minutes of frantic weakness have inflicted on you for so many months."

"Yes. I have been punished, Evy; oh, what tortures, oh, what pangs—and what was worse, I have seen you tortured, too. But I deserved it all. Alas, I knew what I was doing but too well. You kiss my cheek, you press my hand; but do you understand what this hand did? To shield myself from righteous reprobation, to justify my own obstinate self-will——"

"Cease, dear uncle," interrupted Evy, pleadingly; "cease, I pray you, to revive that terrible scene. Whatever may have been your guilt—if such it seems to you—it has been surely expiated. For the future let us live together in content and peace."

"Yes, darling, yes; I would I could hear you say in happiness; but that you have lost for ever, thanks to me—thanks to *me*," and again he gave way to bitter grief.

It was long before Evy could comfort, or even calm him; but at last she succeeded, and left him to seek herself that rest of which she stood so sorely in need. For awhile she lay sleepless, picturing Judith's miserable condition, and considering what words of consolation she should address to her on the morrow; but presently, utterly wearied out, she fell into a deep slumber.

When she woke, it was broad daylight, and starting up, she heard, to her inexpressible dismay, the church clock striking the midday hour. No; it was not the clock; in her confusion and excitement she had mistaken for it the tolling of the church bell.

A shudder ran through her, and she hastily summoned the servant; yet when she came she did not dare to put to her the question that rose to her trembling lips.

"My watch has stopped, Jane; what time is it? I have surely overslept myself."

"It is ten o'clock; but master said you were on no account to be disturbed, miss."

"I am sorry for that. I wished particularly to be up early; I had promised to go to the Park this morning."

Jane did not reply, but busied herself about the room, while the bell boomed hoarsely in the air, like words of doom.

"Who is dead, Jane? Not Judith—not Mrs. Heyton?"

"Yes, Miss Evy. Mr. Mellish called here not ten minutes ago, on his way from her death-bed."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE RECURRENCE OF A PHENOMENON.

THE shock of Judith's death, falling, as it did, upon a constitution already weakened by illness, and which had lost that elasticity which hope alone can give, was almost fatal to Evy herself. She suffered a severe relapse, and so soon as she was strong enough to endure it, her immediate removal to the southern coast was insisted on by Dr. Burne. She was, however, even more unwilling to leave Dunwich than she had been before; it seemed to her that their

quitting it was but too likely to give a colour of truth to the malicious scandals that were in circulation against her uncle; and though there was no pleasure for her in the old place, there were tender memories about it still that flattered a melancholy from which she never expected, and did not desire, to escape. There was no longer any apprehension of meeting her former lover, for he had left the Park on the day after his wife's funeral, and gone abroad, taking the old lord with him—it was said to try the German waters for his gout. The Hall was shut up—as it had never been within the memory of man—and the cards that the county dealt out with a liberal hand, expressing its sympathy with the calamity that had befallen the house of Heyton, accumulated, unacknowledged, in the housekeeper's room. The trite simile of the play of "Hamlet" without

the prince could alone depict the condition of Dunwich without its lord. The one great topic of talk that had served it for generations being thus ruthlessly withdrawn, it fell into a sort of conversational collapse, during which an opportunity was afforded to Mrs. Sanboy for airing her speculations respecting the Thames Tunnel; and to Lieutenant Crewkerne (though he could not, in one sense, obtain a hearing) to give repeated personal narratives (illustrated with walnut diagrams) of the battle of the Nile. But of all this Evy knew nothing; she asked no questions, and Mr. Hulet, acting on the doctor's advice, volunteered no information. When she was first taken—for not only did she evince no volition in the matter, but was so weak as to be actually carried thither—to the Isle of Wight, she expressed some faint admiration, but more surprise, at the beauty

of the furnished villa on the Undercliff which had been secured for their residence.

"Oh, Uncle Angelo—it is lovely; but are you sure that you can afford this even for a few weeks?"

"My darling, we shall be here for many a month, I trust," said he, softly. "You forget that I have got back my own again. Captain Heyton, who knows all, has repaid me every farthing, with interest. A handsomer, though, at the same time, a more distressing communication, I have never read, than that which he wrote me within twenty-four hours of your visit to the Park."

Evy shuddered; for the remembrance of that terrible night still haunted her; and did not even ask to see the captain's letter.

The manifest improvement in her uncle's

spirits, indeed, was evidently a source of pleasure to her, while the loveliness of the scenes about her did not fail in time to charm her inward eye; but, nevertheless, a supreme melancholy seemed to have taken possession of her being. When Mr. Hulet suggested that she should invite her old friend Mrs. Storks, who was most constant in her inquiries and correspondence, to visit them, she declined to do so.

"I like nothing so well as to be alone with you, uncle."

It was evident that she shrank from society of every kind, though Dr. Burne had especially enjoined that she should have it. The colourless, tranquil existence that had been well enough while she was an invalid, was no longer suited for her now that she had recovered her bodily strength. It evidently encouraged the

dejection which threatened to take permanent possession of her mind. Poor Mr. Hulet was at his wits' end for a remedy.

"Is there anything, my darling — any sort of change that you would seem to fancy?" inquired he, one day, in almost despair at the quiet ways and too contented calm that characterized her, so foreign to her age, and so different from the sprightly energy which had once been habitual to her. "We have had this place for nearly a year, my dear, and it rests with you as to whether we shall renew the lease."

"I am quite happy here, dear uncle."

"No, you are not, my darling; you are only resigned to be here—and resignation is not the virtue which becomes a girl—till she is six and thirty. What do you say to going abroad for a year or two? All places are alike to me, except that par-

ticular Spa, which, as I hear, Lord Dirleton has been patronizing for the last twelve months. Talk of bear-leaders; I am sure I pity his poor nephew more than any tutor with 'a tenth transmitter of a foolish face' in his charge. Come, where shall we go, Evy?"

"Would it be very disagreeable for you to go back to Dunwich, Uncle Angelo?" returned she, earnestly.

"To me? Certainly not, my dear, especially as the Hall is shut up; and in the absence of its proprietor, we shall have a right to breathe."

It was astonishing how like Mr. Hulet had grown to his former self, during the last few months; the weight of Judith's foot having been removed, his character had sprung back again like a bent sapling, and resumed its old direction; he was as caustic as ever, except that his irony had

more good humour in it than of old ; only in one thing was there a marked change from the man he had been—he still looked as askance at a bottle of medicine as a teetotaller on a brandy-flask.

According to Evy's wish, the little household, which included but themselves and the faithful Jane—for the villa had been hired with its servants—returned to Dunwich in the ensuing November. It was but one proof of the unhappy lack of interest with which Evy Carthew now regarded all external matters, that she took it for granted that they were returning to Seymour's Home. The carriage stopped, however, short of that edifice, at the gate of another house.

"There is some mistake," began Evy, roused from a long reverie of sad and silent thoughts.

"Nay, my dear, not so," returned her

uncle, smiling; "since you would come back to the old place, I have brought you to the old home—'The Cedars.'"

At the open door stood Mr. and Mrs. Mellish to welcome them. Every room, under their supervision, had been rendered, at Mr. Hulet's request, as like as possible to what it had been when Evy had left it for Balcombe; in her own little boudoir stood the book-case with her favourite volumes, the piano in its proper place, and even the pictures upon the wall in the very spaces they had occupied before. The care and kindness that this manifested upon her uncle's part, overcame the poor girl even more than the surprise itself.

"How much he loves me," thought she, and then reproached herself in that, since his wealth and ease of mind had been restored to him, and he had seemed to

need no especial attendance and comfort at her hands, she had neglected him, and given way to her own selfish sorrows. In future she would do her best to be more cheerful for his sake, even if cheerfulness did not return to her of itself, as there was hope it would, now that she would be able to employ herself actively as of old—for life on the Undercliff had necessarily been idle and aimless. Her first walk in the old garden gave her an exquisite pleasure, nor was the conviction it induced that she had been mistaken in supposing that she had lost the capacity for enjoyment, by any means unwelcome. The day, for a November afternoon, was bright, and its sunshine showed no change in any of her favourite haunts; the fountain leapt and sparkled as of old, the gold-fish winked their fins and shoaled together as though they recognized their

former mistress : the cedar threw its self-same layer of shade above the seat she had loved so well, from which were to be seen the stately woods of Dirleton (once so dear !), the porches of Seymour's Home, in one of which that dread revelation had been made to her of Judith's power ; and the gray church, beneath whose shadow her rival lay, against whom not a spark of anger lingered within her, but only divinest pity.

She asked concerning her of Mr. Mellish —as until then she had never dared to do —as to how, and in what frame of mind, she had died : but he could tell her little. Mrs. Heyton had scarcely spoken to him at all, but had seemed to listen while he prayed aloud. Her husband had come in, and after some whispered communication kissed her : but the old lord—" for reasons you will understand," said the rector,

significantly—"declined to take leave of her."

"Was anything said of me, or of my uncle?" faltered Evy, uncertain whether her companion knew all or no.

"Not by her, except that a few minutes before her death, which happened without pain, she breathed your name; I heard, however, all her sad story from Captain Heyton's lips, who had also informed his uncle."

"Surely there was no need for that," sighed Evy, pitifully.

"I am not so sure, my dear," returned the rector, gravely. "At all events I can imagine that to John Heyton it seemed that not a minute was to be lost in confessing to Lord Dirleton all that had been done, in order that, if possible, reparation should be made, while she who had wrought the wrong still lived. The old lord ad-

vanced the whole sum at once, which his nephew could not have done without much delay, and the last words that her husband whispered to the dying woman, gave her the assurance that that had been accomplished. As to his telling me, he deemed he owed it to your uncle's reputation (which, it seems, had been maliciously aspersed by this unhappy woman) that he should let the truth be known. But I persuaded him to reveal it no further. None who knew Mr. Hulet could suspect him of deliberate unkindness, far less of crime, even when he was an inmate of Seymour's Home, while since he was to be rich again, that of itself would be a styptic to the flow of scandal; I argued, Evy, not justly I allow, but still as I know you yourself would have done, that it was better to shield the memory of the dead from infamy than to set your uncle right with his neigh-

bours. 'But Mr. Hulet is an innocent man!' groaned the poor captain. He was a spectacle, Evy, most piteous to witness; for his sense of right was at war with all the best feelings of his nature. 'True,' said I, 'but your uncle is also innocent. And, ill as he is, it will go nigh to kill him if he hears men say that one of his own blood—and that one the most dear to him—had received as his wife's dower hush-money, and even that through fraud.' That staggered the poor fellow. Otherwise if he alone had had to bear it, he would have shrunk from neither blame nor shame. He had been ignorant, it is true, of his wife's infamy; but his conscience did not hold him guiltless for his conduct in another matter; he had married without loving her, out of mere pique and anger because you would not desert your uncle in his extremity, or permit him — John

Heyton—to give up his brilliant prospects, and ally himself with poverty. That thought wrung his very soul, I know, and I doubt not, wrings it still."

Here Mr. Hulet and Mrs. Mellish fortunately joined them from the house, and spared Evy the embarrassment of a reply. She would scarcely have known what to say for the poor captain; for even the plea that Judith had put in for him, of his having at a most opportune moment fallen a prey to her wiles and charms, had scarcely seemed a sufficient explanation of his conduct. To judge by her uncle's case, as well as by her lover's, it really seemed that men were wont to give way to promptings of the wildest impulse, such as women would be ashamed to obey. Nevertheless, it is certain that Evy had forgiven both offenders; and that, with regard to the absent one, he was by no means forgotten.

Whether his heart was wrung or not, he was far from being in good health—as she heard from more than one quarter—and for that it might, at least, be permitted to her to be sorry.

Mr. Hulet and his niece had not been settled down in their own home for more than a fortnight when news arrived that the old lord was coming back to the Hall. Evy's heart went faster than Dr. Burne would have approved of its doing—for a continuance—when Mrs. Mellish dropped in at The Cedars one morning with these tidings. All, of course, was over between her and Captain Heyton for ever, even if there had not, as before, remained that inseparable bar to their union in the ancestor whose picture had resumed its place in Mr. Hulet's study; she would have died rather than a second time have been the cause of a quarrel between uncle and

nephew, even had the chance been afforded her; but still her heart did give a throb or two at the idea of her once beloved "Jack's" return.

"The old lord has a companion with him," continued Mrs. Mellish, with the air of one who could say more if she chose.

"A companion?" observed Mr. Hulet, dryly, from behind his newspaper. "I hope it is somebody respectable."

"For shame, Mr. Hulet," answered the rector's wife. "How can you be so wicked? It is somebody whom you both know very well and like very much, and who has been with him for some time abroad—a relation of his own. *Now*, come, you can guess?"

"If you mean Captain Heyton, you have described him in an unnecessarily circuitous manner," observed Mr. Hulet, even more dryly than before. He disliked Lord

Dirleton on his own account, and was displeased with the Captain (though otherwise, he did not dislike him) upon Evy's.

"Captain Heyton is not likely to be coming home, poor fellow," answered Mrs. Mellish, a little piqued by this reception of her great news; "they say that, so far from getting better, he is but the shadow of his former self. It is Mr. De Coucy who is expected at the Park to-night with Lord Dirleton."

"I shall be most sincerely pleased to see him!" exclaimed Mr. Hulet, warmly.

Evy made no remark, and looked cast down rather than pleased; but, then, she was not thinking of Mr. De Coucy at all.

Dr. Burne, whose habit it still was to occasionally visit The Cedars, "to look at Miss Evy," as he called it, although his professional services were no longer required ("Hulet's leaving off those drugs

of his was a shameful grievance," he would complain, and had deprived him of a very handsome income), happened to call the next morning upon his whilome patient. He found her, not with her uncle, as usual, but in the drawing-room alone, and looking pale and troubled.

"You had not your proper allowance of sleep, miss, last night," observed he, critically.

"Oh, yes, I had, doctor."

"Then you must have had bad dreams. Did you happen to dream, my dear, of an old gentleman of sixty-six, or so, coming to demand your hand in marriage, and who would not be denied? It was not I, of course, since that would not have been disagreeable to you, but another old gentleman."

Evy shook her head.

"Well, now, that's odd," continued the

doctor, "because you really have such an admirer. I happened to meet him on my early round this morning, and he detained me with your praises to that extent—knowing, I suppose, my greediness in that way—that several persons lost the advantage of my presence at their coming into the world, and also at their going out of it. Do you know any dandified old gentleman who goes without gloves in November the better to exhibit a finger-ring that Pyrgoteles made for Alexander?"

"Ah, you have seen dear Mr. De Coucy! I hope he is well," said Evy, with that show of earnest cheerfulness which ladies have always at command, but that cannot deceive a doctor, even if he be not also a husband.

"Yes, Evy, I have seen Mr. De Coucy," answered the doctor, his manner suddenly changing from gay to grave, "and heard

many things from him which will still have an interest for you, I hope. Do you remember the last time—more than two years ago—that you and I were alone together in this very room, and what we talked about?"

"I do, indeed, doctor," answered Evy, with a sudden blush, "and the remembrance is so painful to me, that I must entreat you not to revert to it. Forgive me for speaking thus, old friend," added she, hurriedly; "I know it is your goodwill and tenderness for me that prompt you to speak on such a subject; yet it is to them that I appeal for silence."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders; "My dear Miss Evy, I am dumb. How is your Uncle Angelo, for I came upstairs without dropping into the study, which is a waste of time, since nothing now is to be got by it? He is in the ruddiest health, of

course: not dyspeptic on account of the argument on duplex sensations we had the other night — though I thought that *would* have delivered him into my hands again."

"I am afraid he is quite well," said Evy, smiling, "though you certainly did excite him very much."

"Well, I could not give in to him, you know; as to his notion that we are all sometimes conscious of present scenes and conversations having taken place, in some previous state of existence—that is to say, in no time—nothing in my opinion can be more fancifully ridiculous; on the other hand, it must be confessed that certain circumstances in our lives seem to have a tendency to recur. This time two years, for instance, I was standing by this window, and you in that very chair yonder, when we beheld a portent—a

miracle—namely, Lord Dirleton walking in Dunwich Street; and there, treading (notwithstanding all those German waters) as gingerly as ever over the stones—*there he is again.*"

"Poor old gentleman," said Evy, pitifully, "I am sorry he is no better." But she did not run to the window, as she had done on the previous occasion, but went on with her needlework as before.

"Such things recur in cycles, I suppose," continued the doctor, gravely. "Every two years, perhaps, he will cross the street just as he is doing now, and come and call at The Cedars."

"Call at The Cedars? He is surely not coming here?" exclaimed Evy, excitedly.

"Most certainly he is, my dear—I should say, straight here, only that his sailing is a little circular, by reason of the more nobbly stones."

"I trust he will not put my uncle out again—I mean that there will be no more wretched quarrels," sighed Evy, apprehensively.

"No, no, Mr. De Coucy is with him, whose common friendship will bind them to keep the peace: and besides, the poor old lord is in no mood for fighting now, with this new trouble hanging over him."

"Trouble, what trouble?" inquired Evy, nervously, and putting down her work.

"That is a subject upon which you have forbidden me to speak, my darling—hark! There's his ring at the bell again. What a tendency circumstances have to recur—especially in bell-ringing. And now he is gone into the study, just as he did before," continued the doctor, with an air of philosophic abstraction. "How very curious and remarkable!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN HISTORICAL ERROR.

"TWO gentlemen to see you, sir," said the servant, entering the study at The Cedars. "Mr. De Coucy, and——"

"Show them in, show them in," cried Mr. Hulet, impatiently, putting aside his newspaper. "My dear De Coucy——" The words of welcome died on his lips, for close behind that well-tried friend hobbled John, Lord Dirleton. "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?" inquired Mr. Hulet, stiffly. He had not

forgotten the insult that the old lord had put upon him in that very room, and his pale cheek flushed with anger at the sight of him.

"To my friend and relative's sense of justice," answered Mr. De Coucy.

"Yes, yes, that's right—and to my Jack," added his lordship, in what he flattered himself was a lower key.

Mr. Hulet motioned them to chairs.

"Thank you, yes, I'll sit down," said the old lord. "Glad to do it, sir. [Wouldn't have done it the last time for a thousand pounds, though; not a bit of it.] I am come here—and an infernally disagreeable thing it is to do—to acknowledge myself in the wrong, Mr. Hulet. When I told you, two years ago, that you were looking to hook my Jack, because he was a gold-fish, for your niece, I committed a great impertinence both to that young lady and

yourself. I can't say more [and never before said half so much to any man: no, by gad]."

"You have said quite enough, Lord Dirleton," answered the other, courteously. "If you had known my niece, such a statement indeed would have been unpardonable; but, being ignorant of her character—and I may add of mine, though that is of less consequence—and judging her by ordinary standards, the idea was natural enough."

"I must tell her so myself, though," was the unexpected reply. ["Wouldn't miss seeing her on any account—uncommon pretty girl.] Upstairs, isn't she?"

"She is in the drawing-room, I believe," answered Mr. Hulet, coldly, for his lordship's "thinkings aloud" were by no means less objectionable in his eyes, from the fact that they were evidently involun-

tary; "she is, however, far from well to-day, and scarcely fit to receive company."

"Lord Dirleton's visit here is as much on her account as on your own, my dear Hulet," urged Mr. De Coucy, gently.

"Yes, by gad," assented his lordship, "and more too. [Never should have come near the house but for her and Jack.] You have received very scurvy treatment, Mr. Hulet, at my nephew's hands, though, indeed, he was quite unaware of the wrong he was committing. [All his wife's fault, confound her: for my part I never liked the girl.]"

"He has made most ample apology and amends, Lord Dirleton, and nothing more need be said upon that matter." And Mr. Hulet glanced uneasily from his lordship towards Mr. De Coucy.

"Oh, De Coucy knows all about it," continued the old lord, interpreting his look

aright; "Jack and I have no secrets from him. Knows about how the screw was put on you—a most infernal shame—and what you really did that got you under her thumb. Foolish of you, very; all resulting from obstinacy of disposition—disinclination to own yourself in the wrong—[throw one's wife into the sea rather than do it; umph: strong measure]. Still, you suffered for it beyond all reason. What a life you must have led: worn me to fiddle-strings, I'm sure. You should have grasped your nettle. Throttled Judith: by gad *I* would. As it is, the sting is left in my poor nephew. Yes, sir, he's a broken man. Listen to me, Mr. Hulet," continued the old lord in pleading tones, "for I love the lad, and can't afford to lose him. The idea of the fraud to which he was a party—although as innocent of it as De Coucy here, or myself—preys on his

mind incessantly: the idea of you and your niece having been ruined in order to fill his pockets, is intolerable to him; no reparation, no amends, can lay that ghost. He looks like a ghost himself, sir. Think of that; such a fine handsome fellow as he was: and all his spirits sunk to zero."

"I am very sorry to hear this, Lord Dirleton, for I have a genuine regard for your nephew. Still I do not see how his case is to be remedied."

"Well, yes, there's one way. That is what I am come about. [Dull old gentleman, very.] Jack loves this niece of yours still, sir, and yet is profoundly conscious of having offended her—by marrying the other, you know—past pardon. Very fanciful of him, you'll say, but so it is. Now what I have come about is to gain her forgiveness—that will be a cordial to my Jack, I know."

"I will guarantee that my niece will grant him that," answered Mr. Hulet; "she loves him, even now, far too well to refuse it: but I cannot permit of your seeing her in person, Lord Dirleton, and conversing with her upon the subject of your nephew. It would only (if I read her feelings aright) awaken memories that are most painful, or perhaps even hopes that can have no possible fulfilment."

"Why no fulfilment?" inquired Mr. De Coucy, eagerly.

"For a reason that Lord Dirleton has expressed, I understand, pretty forcibly," replied Mr. Hulet, coldly. "He has passed his word, it seems, that his nephew shall never have his consent—and without it I am quite sure my niece will never be Mrs. Heyton—to marry into a regicide's family. Now one of my forefathers, I own"—here he pointed to his respected ancestor, above

the chimney-piece, "had the honour to cut King Charles the First's head off. 'What I did I am not ashamed of,' were his gallant words, 'and if it were to do again I would do it.' And I am proud to say that I inherit his sentiments."

"Here you must permit *me* to say a few words," interposed Mr. De Coucy, producing from his pocket some old papers and pamphlets, "because, you see, this being an antiquarian question, is in my line, and I have given a good deal of attention to it. You may perhaps have forgotten—for the circumstance occurred when you were in great trouble upon more than one account—that I called at Cliff Cottage, on one occasion for the express purpose of seeing you upon this subject: but, as it unfortunately happened, too late to accomplish the object I had in view. That was no less than to remove, if possible, the

objection of my friend and relative to your niece's marriage, founded as it was, upon the part played in the national drama by our friend in yonder picture."

"He is not *my* friend," murmured the old lord, sturdily: "the murderous bloody villain."

"Nay, nay," protested Mr. De Coucy. "*That* is certainly not the case, as I have had the pleasure to prove to you. The fact is, my dear Hulet, there has been an historical error here. Your esteemed ancestor may have had all the will in the world to cut King Charles' head off: would have done it, I have no doubt, gratuitously——"

"For a hundred pounds and preferment in the army," interpolated Lord Dirleton.

"That is what his enemies said, my lord. It is quite possible, and for the sake of our host here, I am most ready to believe it,

that his ancestor would have cut the king's head off, as soon as looked at him, and free, gratis, for nothing—only as a matter of fact, he didn't do it."

"Didn't do it?" ejaculated Mr. Hulet, "that is ridiculous. Why, I have had him over my chimney-piece for forty years, quarrelled with my brother-in-law, separated from my only sister, and been at daggers drawn with all my neighbours, just because he did do it. Read that scroll, sir, that runs round it. 'What I did I am not ashamed of, and if it were to do again I would do it.'"

"Those words were imputed to him, my dear sir, it is true, but he denied on his trial that he ever uttered them. He never had the opportunity of distinguishing himself in the way that you imagine. The operation so graphically represented in that picture was performed by the common

hangman, who indeed confessed as much; 'God forgive me,' he said (it was after the other folks had got the upper hand, you know), 'I did it; and I got forty half-crowns for my pains.'"

"But this is monstrous, De Coucy; my unhappy ancestor was tried for this very offence, and found guilty—you will find it in the state trials."

"Yes; but you will also find that he was pardoned, after all, on the ground of insufficient evidence; not to mention that he himself swore like a trooper (you know he *was* a trooper) that he had no more to do with the matter than the Archbishop of Canterbury."

"Did my ancestor say that? Did he really show the white feather?" inquired Mr. Hulet, greatly agitated. "Then I must have been dreadfully mistaken in him all along."

"That is exactly what he said of all the witnesses to his identity. Now if you'll just give your attention to these pamphlets, I'll prove to you without a shadow of doubt, as I have already proved to Lord— by-the-by, where is Lord Dirleton?"

"He is here," answered the old lord, coming into the room, with Evy leaning on his arm, "and in very excellent company. Seeing you both so immersed in antiquarianism, and for my own part preferring youth and beauty, I thought I would join the young lady in the drawing-room. 'My dear,' said I, 'I am come from my poor Jack, who can't live without you. In point of fact, he is on the high-road to the tomb.' So we all are, you know, only I hope there are a few mile-stones yet to be passed on the way, before he gets to his journey's end. Your niece, Mr. Hulet, has not the cruelty to kill a

young fellow, though she has severely wounded an old one," here his lordship pressed his hand upon his heart and bowed profoundly.

It was like a scene in a fine old comedy. Dr. Burne in the doorway was rubbing his hands, as a family physician might well do over the fruitful prospects of the house of Heyton.

Mr. De Coucy, with his papers and pamphlets, might have stood for the family lawyer, had he not here stepped forward, and placed upon Evy's finger a ring, which we have seen before, with the crest of her future husband engraven on it. "I told you once, Miss Evy, that I should give you this on your marriage day; but since my cousin, the captain, is so far away, I place it here in proxy for him, a sign of your betrothal—and a very pretty engaged ring upon your pretty hand it looks."

Covered with blushes, and confusion, Evy looked up to thank him, then turned to her beloved uncle to receive from him the congratulations which his happy smile had already ensured to her, and which she valued more than all. But at that moment Mr. Angelo Hulet was otherwise engaged; he had climbed upon a chair, and was gravely occupied in turning the picture of his no-longer-revered ancestor with its face to the wall.

"I was right in principle, my dear," explained he, to his astonished niece, as he folded her in his arms. "I'll go to the stake on that: but as to that fellow in the Frock and Vizard, there has been an Historical Error."

## CHAPTER XV.

### CONCLUSION.

CAPTAIN JOHN HEYTON did not return from the German Baths by those short stages, and in that leisurely manner, which invalids generally affect. He travelled by express trains, a quick steamer, and where steam was wanting, as fast as post-horses could carry him. It was not, however, without some feeling of confusion and shame, that he got out at The Cedars instead of the Park — only imagine how *that* news flew like wildfire over combustible

Dunwich — and was ushered into Evy's presence.

His uncle had written to him, indeed, to tell him he was forgiven; but he was conscious that his conduct towards her— the extreme rapidity with which he had transferred his hand, if not his heart, to another — was deserving of the gravest censure. He had absolutely no excuse to offer for it. Without being a student of human nature, instinct told him a woman would see none in the resentful pique which had turned his disappointed passion to another object; and very wisely, without an attempt at justification, he threw himself on Evy's mercy — which, as it happened, was into her arms.

Do not let us, as Mr. Angelo Hulet was so unfortunate as to do, intrude upon them at so inopportune a moment.

"I gave you a quarter of an hour," ex-

plained he, plaintively, "and thought all that sort of thing would have been over."

His experience of life had given but a narrow limit to the duration of affection in such cases, and probably, therefore, to its demonstration. But the old man had a hearty welcome from them both. Nor did it ever fail him. He has not lost his darling, for the second Mrs. Heyton lives but a few minutes' walk from him at the Hall, and Dirleton Park is no longer a place forbad to him. He does not consider himself to lie under any obligation to its owner when he visits it to see his niece; and, indeed, Lord Dirleton and himself, considering that they have not a characteristic in common, except an inflexible obstinacy, are really on very good terms. One great bond between them is the affection they both bear for Evy.

"I love your niece, sir," confessed the old lord, on one occasion, "almost as well as Jack—nay, almost as well as Jack loves her; and, by gad, how I hated the other!"

There is no one, when he has the gout, who ventures to come within twenty feet of him, except "that ministering angel," as he calls her, whose delicate fingers he even trusts to put the rag dipped in soda on his toe to soothe its torments.

It having been brought to his ears, I know not through what channel, that Mrs. Colville had said something to Evy's discredit in connection with the past, he taxed her with it; and on that unfortunate lady's failing to explain the matter so satisfactorily as was to be wished, he called her such a name as it is impossible to repeat, and which offended her so excessively, that she vowed she would never set foot in the Hall again; and she had to be asked to

dinner there before she did. She has long ago, however, in common with the rest of the Dunwich gossips, abjured all her old opinions with respect to the mistress of Dirleton Park, in whose position not the slightest "incongruity" is now discernible. Even indirect connection with the house of Heyton works such wonders with these excellent folks, that Mr. Angelo Hulet is a demigod among them, and to revive against him any such foolish scandal as once found such ready acceptance, would be held a blasphemy. As to that coroner's inquest —down Balcombe way—it is generally understood that the jury coupled with their verdict the expression of their respectful sympathy with the widower in his regretted bereavement.

What, however, such people think or say, is now but of small account with either Evy or her uncle. The good opinion

of those friends whom they retained in their adversity, and which alone is valuable to them, they still retain. To Evy's wedding, which, for more than one reason, and also at her own particular request, took place very quietly at The Cedars, in addition to Lord Dirleton's relatives (including, of course, excellent Mr. De Coucy), the rector and his wife, and Dr. Burne, were invited Mr. and Mrs. Hodlin Barmby, and Mrs. General Storks. These last are also often guests at Dirleton Park, to which Evy has carte blanche from the old lord to ask whomsoever she pleases.

Lucullus Mansion, under its mistress' new system of management, has proved so excellent a speculation, that she has recovered out of it her husband's fortune, and parted with the good-will to a Limited Company, under whose sway the food and wine are said to be as abominable as ever;

he keeps his hunters (but not his race-horses), and, much to their common advantage, she still keeps the purse.

Years have gone by, as the inmates of the nursery at the Park abundantly testify, and yet Mrs. Storks does not look a day older than when we made her acquaintance at Balcombe. Every Christmas she visits her old friend, and finds her a "companion" as gentle and unspoilt as she could possibly have expected her to be, when she offered her a salary to fill that situation, and "to make the tea and arrange the flowers." She stood sponsor to the son and heir of Dirleton (Mr. De Coucy and Mr. Mellish being the other sponsors), and is a sort of fairy godmother (with endless gifts) to all the rest. It is said, however, that the men are afraid of her; and that she will at last succumb to the importunities of Mr. Paragon, who has asked her in mar-

riage about four times. I can scarcely believe this, but he was positively invited to the Park, during the last hunting season, while Mrs. Storks was staying there; and it is certain Mrs. Heyton did not ask "Jack" to invite him on her own account.

In her beloved husband she has, she imagines, secured a Paragon already. And indeed, though something too much of a centaur for the taste of some persons, he is a most excellent and faithful fellow, and knows how to appreciate the prize that has fallen to him from that Matrimonial Lottery from which he once so rashly snatched a blank.

THE END.

BILLING, PRINTER, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
823 P29A C001 v.3
At her mercy : a novel /
3 0112 088987141